

Regional Workshop: Capacity Building Social Workers for Disaster Response in Malaysia

REPORT

Nobuyuki Kataoka (Shikoku Gakuin University)
Members, International Committee,
Japanese Coordinating Body for IFSW Membership

Between March 6th and 7th, a disaster workshop was held in the Malaysian capital of Kuala Lumpur. It was organized by the Malaysian Association of Social workers with the backed-up of grants from the Japanese Center for Social Welfare Promotion and National Examination acquired by the Japanese Coordinating Body for IFSW Membership (JCB).

There approximately 90 participants to the workshop. From Malaysia, in addition to social workers working at the Department of Social Welfare of the federal government and medical social workers from public hospitals, many staff and volunteers active in disaster response from private and/or charity organizations participated. The variety of organizations was truly amazing, including Muslim, Christian, Buddhist ones, and agencies specializing in disaster response. Outside of Malaysia, we had 5 people from Indonesia and one from Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, and Palestine each. From JCB, Dr. Viktor Virag (Assistant to the President at the IFSW Asia Pacific Region) and I attended.

The content of the workshop was made up of two pillars; lectures on basic knowledge regarding disaster response and group work to increase professional and practical skills on the field. Instead of having many speakers taking the pulpit and sharing about their particular fields, we had a pair of two trainers from the Philippines and Malaysia who managed the two day workshop as a whole.

On the first day, after an initial basic lecture on disaster, we had group discussions and presentations on vulnerability with regard to disaster and what measures to take to respond to them. Later, we had lectures on assessment methods and psychological first aid. For closing, we engaged in a group work about how to act verbally and what precautions we should take when entering the disaster area and trying to talk to a lonely survivor.

On the second day, first we had a lecture and exchange of opinions about how to create safe places for survivors, especially about activities aimed at children. There were discussions on gender issues and LGBT related concerns. Next, with the topic of ethical issues in disaster response, a lecture and discussion followed. Private support organizations in Malaysia have to engage in aggressive PR activities about their practice to increase their status and gain funds, but many groups pointed out privacy problems when using survivor photos and dilemmas regarding cultural and ethnic differences including indigenous people.

In the afternoon was made up of a group work where people were invited to set up specific topics that they are especially interested in and other participants could freely join and participate in these theme-based groups under the leadership of the proposing person. I joined a group about how to raise

social awareness of disasters. In Malaysia, citizens have a weak interest and the government has a low level of measures related to disasters, so we had an eagerly discussed what can be done in such a situation. We made suggestions to form core groups who can be active even if they are small in numbers but have a high level of interest and passion and also to involve school education.

Finally, we formed a double or triple circle with chairs only and had a session where everybody could express their impressions about the workshop by using a young plant as a talking piece. There were many statements about how much we had learned and that we should develop this network future and take actual action. In fact, we went way over time.

The two trainers held discussions with the organizers and .based on participant feedback, worked hard to respond in a flexible way to make changes to the program contents, so that they can accommodate the diverse needs and initiatives of the participants as much as possible. It left a strong impression that between lectures and group work some participants came forward that they would like to share their own field experience in disaster response with everybody. This lead to more open exchanges and one could truly feel the participants' strong commitment and passion.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to President Teoh Ai Hua and everyone at the Malaysian Association of Social Workers for making this most satisfactory workshop a reality.