

## **Discourses of Flood Disaster Preparedness by NGOs: Humanitarian Aid, Teamwork and Victimization**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In recent years global warming and climate change due to human activity and natural phenomena, have become recognized as major contributors to the increased occurrence of flood events worldwide. Similarly, the frequency and seriousness of floods in Malaysia have made it a major threat to the country. To this end, research on flood disaster has increased. Most investigations have however, focused on engineering fields, thus there is a real need for research on human activities, response and involvement. Addressing the need for research on human involvement in flood, we adopt a social constructionist perspective to investigate the discursive construction of knowledge about flood disaster preparedness by NGOs commonly involved in flood mitigation and management in Johor. We draw on the perspective that disaster discourses reveal interpretations and perceptions of ways of understanding flood disaster, and that different discourses directly shape and influence response and action for flood mitigation and management. The data consists of four in-depth semi-structured interviews with officers from various NGOs. Adopting van Leeuwen's Critical Discourse Analytic approach, i.e. recontextualisation of social practice and representation of social actors and social action, the findings show that the members from NGOs employ various discourses such as discourses of flood causation, discourses of teamwork and humanitarian which have a direct impact on their actions/ response during the floods. More specifically, these discourses highlight more of what they do rather than the communities being helped. The study posits that the discourses not only show the positioning of the NGOs as humanitarians called on to help others, but via a discourse of victimization, they construct flood risk communities as helpless victims awaiting assistance. It advocates a change in mindset of the various parties involved in flood disaster mitigation and management in Malaysia, from that of perceiving the community as victims to survivors, thereby tapping on the communities' resourcefulness via discourses of empowerment, communitarianism and responsabilization.

**Keywords:** Discourse; Flood Disaster Preparedness in Malaysia; Critical Discourse Analysis; NGOs; , Recontextualisation Of Social Practice

### **INTRODUCTION**

In recent years, flooding has become a major global concern. Due to global warming and climate change, there has been an exponential increase in rainfalls exceeding record amounts that has led to floods worldwide in many countries such as the United States, Philippines,

India, Pakistan and others (Schumann et al., 2018). In the case of Malaysia, according to Chan et al. (2019), the frequency and seriousness of floods has become more threatening to the country in the past ten years in view of damages and losses accrued to the nation. Historically being a riverine society, floods were seen to be a part of the daily lives of an agrarian society. In fact, floods in Malaysia can be traced back to as early as 1886 when the whole of Peninsular Malaysia had been affected by floods (Chan, 2015). However, after the 2014 floods, which were recorded as the worst to hit Malaysia in over a decade due to the massive damage caused to the east coast of Peninsula Malaysia, (Center for Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance [CFE-DM], 2016), floods have since been declared as a ‘Disaster’

Today, flooding is seen as a major disaster facing the country which needs to be addressed in an urgent manner (Center for Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance [CFE-DM](2016). This has been attributed to a combination of factors, namely natural phenomenon (heavy monsoonal and conventional rainfall, flat topography on both coasts of Peninsular Malaysia, heavy siltation of rivers) and human activities (changed land use due to deforestation, agricultural practices and urbanization), as some causes of floods in Malaysia (Chan et al, 2019). Although flood is assumed as one of the weather-related natural disasters, human factors contribute in a direct way to the occurrence of floods (Khan et al, 2014; Chan et al, 2019). With the urgency of flooding risks due to both natural and human factors, Flood Disaster Risk Reduction (FDRR) has become a top priority for the Malaysian government via the introduction of new initiatives that have called for more research in this area. For example after the 2014 flood disaster, a new Centre of Excellence for Research on disaster management was set up and RM20mil in special grants was offered for research into disaster management and flood mitigation following the 2014 flood disaster (The Star, 2015).

The government’s measure has led to an increase in research on flood disaster in recent years. Chan et al (2019) explain that major flood disaster measures and research in Malaysia focus more on techno-centric approaches that give importance to the ability of technology to protect and manage the environment and communities (e.g. Mohit & Sellu, 2013; Isahak et al., 2018). In fact, most studies mainly emphasize on the fields of hydrology and engineering for the improvement of hydraulic models and the importance of structural measures (Chan et al, 2019; 2015). Therefore, structural or engineering measures in flood mitigation are prioritized while non-structural measures that focus on human activities, response and involvement are given less importance (Chan et al, 2019). Chan et al., (2015) assert that a multi-disciplinary approach in solving flood issues is much needed. Thus, a truly effective flood mitigation and management program for Malaysia must see a systematic collaboration of all parties involved such as government, private sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and communities (Chan et al., 2019; Sobian, 2016). Parallel to the lack of non-structural measures, we can also state that research on non-structural measures especially from a social sciences perspective for flood disaster mitigation and management in Malaysia is equally limited (Chan et al, 2019; Lai & Chan, 2015).

Our study draws on previous research that have called for more investigations into non-structural measures to shed more light on the practices of various stakeholders such as the government, private sectors, NGOs and the public as a means to understand the important role they play in helping victims cope with and recover from flood disaster in Malaysia (e.g. Chan, 2015 & 2019; Sobian, 2016; Lai & Chan, 2015). Extending upon such studies, we look at the importance of flood disaster preparedness which refers to every aspect of flood disaster mitigation and management with a focus on strengthening human capital, i.e. citizens, communities, state, local, volunteers and others in preparation, mitigation, response and action. We take on a social constructionist perspective that sees flood disaster preparedness as

a social practice and as discourse, to investigate the discursive construction of knowledge about flood disaster preparedness in Malaysia of the various parties such as government, NGOs and flood-risk communities. Our main aim is to identify their perceptions of floods, their response and strategies to overcome flood risks and damages. In this paper, we report on the findings of the perceptions (i.e. discourses of flood disaster) of officials from NGOs who are normally involved in FDRR in Malaysia.

The study is based on Paidakaki's (2012) view that, the discourse of disaster provides an interdisciplinary perception of representations of disaster, ways of understanding disaster, and rational reactions to disaster. In other words, disaster discourses focus on interpretations and debates on what disasters really are, how to evaluate their consequences, and how to deal with the consequence in effective ways. We also draw on Aragon-Durand's (2009) explanation that different disaster discourses shape and have a direct impact on the types of policies as well as programs for flood responses, mitigation, etc. Thus, how people view a disaster directly shapes and influences their response and actions during a disaster, and this is always achieved by drawing upon specific discourses. In this paper, we look at the discourses (spoken) that are drawn upon by representatives of NGOs when talking about their involvement in flood disaster preparedness in Malaysia. In this sense, it is based on the perspective that when the officers talk about their involvement in floods, they draw upon specific discourses of flood disaster, and these discourses in turn shape and influence the type of response, policy and programs that are developed and implemented by NGOs. The discourses will provide us with an understanding of their knowledge, perceptions, attitude and response and how this impacts flood disaster preparedness in Malaysia. For this purpose, we employ van Leeuwen's Critical Discourse Analytic framework (2008) , i.e. recontextualisation of social practice, representation of social actors and social action, for the study of social practices and discourse. Thus, in this study, flood disaster preparedness is viewed as a social practice with the aim of identifying the main discourses used by the actors.

With discourse as the central tenet of our study, we answer the following research questions:

- i. What are the discourses employed by the representatives from NGOs when talking about their experiences in dealing with the social practice of flood disaster preparedness?
- ii. How do the discourses relate to their response and action to flood disaster preparedness?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### FLOOD DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

The main focus of the current study is discourses of flood disaster preparedness employed by NGOs. Generally, preparedness is known as one of the disaster phases in the disaster management cycle namely preparedness, recovery and response and mitigation which include a list of activities to enhance emergency aimed at improving coping capabilities and response activities (Shreve et al., 2014; Leman et al., 2016). Emphasis on preparedness planning not only enhances effective response to disaster during and immediately after disasters but also improves short- and longer-term recovery (Sutton & Tierney, 2006). Disaster preparedness thus, is imperative to every level of society, namely individuals, family, community, government and stakeholders in order to respond and recover well when a disaster happens (Sutton & Tierney, 2006; Tomio et al., 2014). Therefore, individuals can respond more efficiently and ensure a speedy recovery. Moreover, disaster preparedness at the individual level enhances the survivability level for all involved, reduces pressure on aid and rescue members and lastly contributes to community resilience (Sadeka et al., 2015).

Currently, Malaysia's strategies for flood mitigation and management are government centric that have been overly focused on the traditional framework of relief and rehabilitation, which include evacuation and relief activities that take place in the 'during' and especially in the 'post-disaster' stages (Chan, et al., 2019). For example rescue, evacuation, relief distributions, mass feeding and cleaning up of the affected areas, medical support, and etc, all of which can be said to be 'dependency type relief measures' (Luna, 2001), instead of preparedness measures in the 'pre-disaster' stage. Thus, actual measures towards preparedness at local community level can be said to be a weakness of the current mechanism for disaster management. This was evident in the aftermath of the 2014 flood disaster, whereby most NGOs and the public as well as the affected communities had perceived flood disaster mitigation and management as the sole responsibility of the government, while the financial and technological inputs in the during and post disaster were seen as most important in such disasters. Another critique of the 'dependency type relief measures' is that donations and relief provisions are short-term and of charitable nature which does not empower communities or people, rather it leads to dependency and helplessness instead of pro-active measures (Chan, 2012).

In relation to research on flood disaster in Malaysia, most studies are said to be more inclined towards structural or engineering measures as well as on 'dependency type relief measures in the during and post disaster period (e.g. Chan et al., 2012, 2015, 2019; Isahak et al., 2018; Mohit & Sellu, 2013; Asmara & Ludin, 2014). Thus, our study addresses the need for research on flood disaster preparedness and the involvement of human capital such as NGOs in FDRR in Malaysia.

#### NGOS AND FLOOD DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

In Malaysia, some of the major parties involved in flood mitigation and management are government based departments, e.g. the National Security Division, Disaster Relief and Preparedness Committee, Natural Disaster Management and Relief Committee, National Flood Disaster Relief Machinery, National Disaster Response Mechanism, Department of Irrigation and Drainage (DID), Civil Defence Department, Fire and Rescue Department and Social Welfare Department (Khalid and Shafiai, 2015; Rahman, 2012). Besides government departments, voluntary organizations such as NGOs are also actively involved in flood mitigation and management. NGOs are one of the organizations that provide quick assistance to the affected community during floods (Mondal *et al.*, 2000). Their assistance comes in the form of rescue operations, relief materials, and temporary shelters and so on. Some NGOs even provide training and education voluntarily on disaster management to the community. The relief and rehabilitation phase has always been a major focus for NGOs (Mondal *et al.*, 2000).

NGOs are acknowledged as the main service providers during a disaster. They frequently initiate and execute community-level programs before and after disasters (Izumi & Shaw, 2012). Nikkiah and Redzuan (2010) explain that the major role of NGOs is to develop sustainable community as they have many functions and programs to guide the community to become empowered and finally achieve sustainable development. Apart from that, one of the notable characteristics of NGOs is that they have a closer relationship with the communities. Thus, they are more familiar with local custom and culture as they can easily understand the importance of a community-based approach. They have the capacity to build a network with governments as both organizations understand the needs and local culture. Besides that, NGOs can develop the network with other stakeholders such as academic organization, media and private sectors. In Malaysia, the NGOs active in flood disaster mitigation and management include the Malaysia Red Crescent Society, Medical Relief Society Malaysia

(MERCY), Rakan Kembara Johor and Ihsan Johor among others. These NGOs display their roles differently based on their own objectives and values. For example, Mercy provides immediate medical relief and humanitarian assistance to disaster victims while the main operation of Johor Red Crescent Society is to help the government agencies for immediate assistance during disaster. The role of Rakan Kembara Johor and Ihsan Johor is to provide aid to communities during the disaster.

Our discussion so far has highlighted the importance of NGOs in FDRR. Consequently, it can be said that due to the NGO's extensive networks, their contributions are critical during disasters (Izumi & Shaw, 2012). They are also the key partners with the government as well as the community. Thus, it is important to understand the mindset of representatives from NGOs as they play a vital role in influencing and shaping the flood prone community's thinking and perceptions of flood disaster preparedness. In this article, we focus on the knowledge, perceptions, attitude and response of NGOs and how this impacts FDRR in Malaysia. We take on a critical discourse analytic approach to identify the main discourses drawn upon by NGOs and the impact of the discourses on their involvement in FDRR. To this end, we draw on van Leeuwen's Critical Discourse Analytic (CDA) framework for the study of social practice and discourse, i.e. recontextualisation of social practice.

#### RECONTEXTUALISATION OF SOCIAL PRACTICE

This framework is based on the principles of Social Constructionism that sees people's belief and thinking as the foundation of meaning and knowledge (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Through interactions among people, how we view and understand the world is determined. Thus, language is the medium for the interchange of information, ideas and formation of meaning. In this sense, talk engages the construction or creation of certain stories or narratives of the world (Edley, 2001). When such stories and narratives are written or spoken about, this entails what van Leeuwen calls 'recontextualisation' or discursive representation (of knowledge about reality).

According to van Leeuwen (1993a, p. 30) social practices refer to the things people do, and they are usually "...fixed by custom or explicit prescription, or some mixture of these two". The main elements of a social practice that become recontextualised (represented discursively) may include among others, the participants and activities, which van Leeuwen (2008) categorises as 'social actors' and 'social action', respectively. Van Leeuwen's framework has been used widely, e.g. Noraznita Othman et al., (2019), Rasti & Sahragard, 2012, Sandaran, 2008).

In this study, flood disaster preparedness is viewed as a social practice that involves specific social actors (e.g. NGOs, communities) and social actions (e.g. rescue, provide aid) (The representation of social actors and social action is discussed in the Methodology Section) The process of the recontextualisation of social practice involves some elements of the original social practice being imported or taken out of their context and situated into another context. This entails the practical knowledge of the social practice whereby knowledge becomes represented through discursive means or linguistic means. Therefore when a social practice such as flood disaster preparedness is written or spoken about (reported, discussed, described), it is being recontextualised. A good example to illustrate this is when the officers from NGOs talk about their organization and their roles and responsibilities, the organization itself is the social actor, while their response and activities are the social actions when involved in FDRR. Thus, when they talk about their experience in FDRR, they are taking out some elements of their involvement in FDRR and recontextualising them via linguistic

means. And the linguistic means by which the social practice is spoken about employs discourses (van Leeuwen, 2008).

Discourse being the main element of this study, refers to van Leeuwen's (2008, p. 193) conceptualisation of discourse as "a way of representing social practice(s), as a form of knowledge, as a thing people say about social practice(s)". van Leeuwen (2005, pp. 94-6) further explains that the 'same' issue or object "can be represented differently through differing discourses". This relates to several different ways of knowing, and thus of representing the same 'object' of knowledge". van Leeuwen calls this the 'plurality of discourse'. Some examples that illustrate the social constructions of disasters and the plurality of discourses include 'disaster as complexity' (Oliver-Smith, (1999), 'flood disaster as social vulnerability' (Yang et al., 2010), 'disaster as social problems (Byrant et al., 2007) and as a social phenomenon (Café, 2012). The plurality of discourses of flood disaster highlights that floods can be represented differently by people via discourses that are based on their perceptions, beliefs, attitudes and life experiences. As such, the rise of sea level that causes floods can be attributed to natural phenomenon such as El Nino or greenhouse effect, while others may draw on blame of human activities even for weather related occurrences of floods.

Taking on this tradition, we view flood disaster preparedness as a social practice. And when the actors within the social practice of flood disaster preparedness such as the officials from NGOs talk about their experiences of dealing with FDRR, they are in actual fact recontextualising the social practice and discursively representing their involvement in FDRR via varying discourses of flood disaster. These discourses would help us understand their roles, beliefs, perceptions and response and the impact of the discourses on flood disaster preparedness in Malaysia.

## METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative approach because it aims to explore the different discourses of flood disaster preparedness as constructed through the narration of the experiences of the officers from NGOs involved in FDRR. There are five key stages in this research procedure beginning with Stage 1 – Selection of participants for interview; Stage 2 – Conducting the interview; Stage 3 – Transcribing the data; Stage 4 – Coding the data; and Stage 5 – Data analysis.

The primary data is the transcription of four semi-structured interviews of staff from four NGOs selected based on their key roles in FDRR in Johor. Each NGO plays a specific role. The Medical Relief Society Malaysia (MERCY) mainly focuses on providing immediate medical relief to those affected in disasters. Malaysian Red Crescent Society works closely with government agencies to provide assistance such as ambulance service. Rakan Kembara Johor works closely with the communities by supplying foodstuff, and other basic needs. Ihsan Johor gives assistance to communities by cleaning, cooking, rebuilding homes etc. Purposive sampling was used to select the respondents based on their experience and involvement in flood disaster. All four of them hold key positions (i.e. chairman, treasurer, project and technical executive and state representative) and have more than five years of experience dealing with floods in Johor. The interview questions were adopted from the study by Sunarharum (2016) which include three types of questions, namely broad questions (*Why do you think we have floods?*), probing questions (*Tell me about your flood experience*) and reflective questions (*Do you think it has gotten worse over the years?*). In addition to the prepared questions, some spontaneous questions were asked during the interviews, based on the development of the conversations with the respondents.

The data is coded based on emergent themes. Hence, a framework of thematic ideas is developed. As an example, representation of flood is coded according to various themes related to the issue of the flood, i.e. their perceptions, attitude, behaviour, actions, etc. For example, when they talk about floods, they basically talk about subthemes such as frequency. After thematic coding, the analysis follows Fairclough's (1995, pp. 57-8) perspective that discourse as *text* (spoken or written) constitutes the linguistic features and organisation of concrete instances of discourse. The linguistic analysis of texts involves identifying patterns in vocabulary (e.g. wording and metaphor), grammar (e.g. modality), cohesion (e.g. conjunction), text structure (e.g. turn-taking) etc. In this study, we identified lexis such as nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs and phrases as emergent themes which are embedded within varying discourses of flood disaster.

## DATA ANALYSIS

The lexical choices of the respondents when talking about their involvement in flood disaster and their response and action forms the main part of the analysis using van Leeuwen's Critical Discourse Analytic framework (2008), i.e. recontextualisation of social practice, representation of social actors and social action. When members of NGOs talk about their experience in flood disaster, they are recontextualizing their experiences and their representations draw on specific flood disaster discourses. Two dominant elements of flood disaster that become recontextualised are the social actors and social actions. Here the social actors would refer to the NGOs, community, government, etc, while the social action would be about their response to the flood situation, e.g. roles, rescue activities, etc. The way in which these two elements become recontextualized is the focus of the study. van Leeuwen's categories for the representation of social actors and social action which make up the analytic framework, are summarized in Tables 1 and 2 below.

TABLE 1. Selected categories from the Social Actor Network and their representative meanings (van Leeuwen, 2008)

Categories of representations of Social Actors	Meaning
Functionalization	References of social actors by their actions and events like roles or occupations.
Identification	References of social actors in terms of what they are
- Classification	References of social actors by difference between a group of people within a specified society or organization.
- Relational identification	References of social actors by individual relationships, association or workplace relations.
- Physical identification	References of social actors by physical description to exclusively differentiate them from a particular background.
Exclusive/Inclusive	Include or exclude people through the ways in which they are discursively mentioned in the texts, explicitly or otherwise
Activation/Passivation	Activation refers to an actor who is active and plays a vibrant role. Passivation refers to an actor who is 'patient'/ the 'receiver' that undergoes the activity or being positioned in the receiving.

TABLE 2. Selected categories from the Social Action Network and their representative meanings (van Leeuwen, 2008)

Categories of Representation of Social Actions	Meaning
Reactions Specified	Personal feelings
Unspecified reactions	Cognitive, affective or perceptive
Activated Or Deactivated	Verbs like 'react' and 'respond'
	Active and Passive actions
Material Action	Utilizes actions for doing
Semiotic Action	Utilizes actions for meaning
Interactive	Refers to actions via verbs that take humans as the goal
Instrumental	Utilizes the goal of actions that may be human or nonhuman or humans can be interchangeable with objects

By looking at the representations of the actors and actions, via the choice of words used to describe them, social practices are transformed into discourses via discursive representations. To explain how the analysis is undertaken, we refer to an example here. When the respondents describe their actions during and after a disaster, they represent their roles as being active and dynamic. This displays 'activation'. van Leeuwen (2008) sees actions as either being active (activation) or passive (passivation). In this sense, social actors are either activated or passivated. Through activation, social actors are known as the dynamic agent or active doers in an activity, while in passivation they are represented as agentless and the activity is done onto them. When they represent flood prone communities, for example as passive actors, the respondents draw on a *discourse of victimization*, through use of lexical items such as 'helpless' and 'victims'.

## FINDINGS/DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings based on the analysis of the interviews with the officials from the NGOs. The aim is to identify how they recontextualise the social practice of flood disaster and the discourses their representations draw on which relate to their response or action, and impact on FDRR in Malaysia.

### DISCOURSES OF FLOOD DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

In general, when talking about their experiences in FDRR, the officials draw on different discourses. In relating flood causation, they employ the *discourses of act of man* and *act of nature*. When talking about their roles and goals, they employ a *humanitarian discourse* and *teamwork*. In relation to how they represent the community, a *discourse of victimization* is evident. In the following paragraphs, we explain how these discourses are drawn upon.

When the officers from the NGOs are asked about the causes of the floods in Malaysia, they mention '*weather, improper drainage and developmental activities*' as the causes. Respondents recall in the following examples:

*First, floods occur due to the weather. Our ozone is getting older, getting thinner. Second, buildings. In the past, there were many trees, there was strong soil. Now many trees have been cut down. Many flash floods occur due to development (NGO 1, lines 61-64).*

*Drainage system plays a role. For example, in Kelantan, there is no proper drainage system in the town. If there is an overwhelming amount of rain, the risk is very high for the flood. Two years ago, severe floods took place in Kelantan and this time was bad. In Penang, we know this is the first time. There was a flood in Penang because of development and trees do not exist (NGO 3, lines 59-64).*



In this way, they discuss three main flood causations, namely weather, drainage system and development. Here, we draw upon van Leeuwen's categories for the representation of social actions, namely 'agentialization' and 'deagentialization' to explain the causes. According to van Leeuwen (2008), agentialized actions are brought upon by human agency while deagentialized actions are related to natural forces. Hence, when the respondents talk about the causation of floods, they talk about human agency, i.e. the active doer of the action or natural forces. In other words, the drainage system and development are agentialized, represented as brought on by human agency, while causes such as weather are deagentialized, thus represented as an act of nature. Hence, they represent causes of floods by drawing upon the discourses of *act of man* when talking about development and drainage system, and *act of nature* in relation to the weather and river.

When talking about their involvement in floods, NGOs are involved actively in the 'during' and 'after' phases of the floods. They generally use 'material actions' (doings) to represent their involvement. According to van Leeuwen (2008), social action can be represented as 'material' or 'semiotic'. 'Material action' refers to the 'doing' while 'semiotic actions' refer to 'meaning'. In the following extracts, the officers talk about what they do during and after the floods.

*If there is a disaster near Johor, we report it ourselves. When we report, we inform them of the number of moving kitchens and materials needed by the organisation. We inform JKM. Normally, JKM has regular materials, unless they cannot afford it, they will ask for our help (NGO 1, lines 28-32).*

For example, during the floods, they 'inform, report, send, cook, help, clean'. After the floods, they carry out actions such as 'clean and provide help'. These actions are material actions that are transactive as they involve two participants, namely the actor (who carry out the action) and the goal (extended process). For example, during or after a disaster, NGOs (actor) help flood-risk communities (goal). These transactive actions are instrumental as the goals are human. Based on their organization's roles, they usually have a list of tasks to carry out (material actions) during and after the disaster. Thus, NGOs usually carry out material actions in mitigating and managing floods. This means that they talk about their roles as active doers of communitarian actions. They represent their action as being dynamic where by their functions are activated when a disaster happens.

When they talk about what is being done as a part of mitigation strategy, they mainly talk about themselves. Therefore, when they talk about their role, they construct themselves as having 'agency'— as 'agent'/'participant'/'doer' (van Leeuwen, 2008: 42-5). They refer to themselves based on the names of their organizations. This is a form of 'identification' in terms of who they are (van Leeuwen, 2008). They also construct themselves as 'volunteers' and 'state representatives', which is a form of 'functionalization' in terms of what they do (Van Leeuwen, 2008). When they refer to themselves as a 'state representative' and 'volunteer', once again they identify themselves as the active doers, via their function as the ones called on to provide aid to those in need.

*After 12 hours, many volunteers can help (NGO 1, lines 19-20).*

*I'm state representative and volunteer with Mercy Malaysia. (NGO 2, line 3).*

And when they talk about their involvement in flood mitigation, they use a collective noun 'we'. This is a form of 'assimilation'. van Leeuwen (2008) refers to assimilation as groups. The pronoun 'we' is used for the construction of a collective identity and collective action of 'we as volunteers' or 'we as humanitarians'. Use of 'we' draws upon the concept of

'team' to construct a collective identity of the people through their involvement via teamwork. Besides 'we', they also use 'our' to refer to the members of their team, e.g. 'our volunteers' and 'our responsibilities'. This draws upon a **discourse of teamwork**. Respondents use nouns 'we', 'team' and 'our' in the following examples:

*After the floods, we have a team that does research (NGO1, line 45).*

*One of our responsibilities is to make sure of the safety of our volunteers and provide shelter and food and make sure the team is well-taken care of (NGO 2, lines 7-8).*

When they talk about their response and action, the officers draw on the mission statements of their organizations as different NGOs have very specific objectives and protocols for their involvement in flood preparedness. They strive to achieve the objectives and protocols through their service. In this sense, the officers reveal that their main objective is to help people. They also represent their involvement through the purpose of their organization. They use adjectives such as 'humanity and humanitarian assistance' to represent their involvement. This is a form of 'functionalization' (Van Leeuwen, 2008) in terms of what they do. Thus, the main goal of their involvement is to provide aid. This draws on a **humanitarian discourse**. Respondents recall in the following examples:

*We came for humanity, not a party. That's our concept. Our task is to help. We have no money to help people. We help with our energy (NGO 1, lines 94-96).*

*Mercy Malaysia is mainly is, look at the word Mercy, Medical Relief, so our core is to provide immediate medical relief and humanitarian assistance to disaster victims (NGO 2, lines 22-24).*

When the NGO officers talk about the communities affected by floods, they represent them in three different homogenous groups, namely 'victim', 'community' and 'beneficiary' which are forms of 'identification' (Van Leeuwen, 2008) in terms of who they are. When labelling the flood affected communities as 'victims' and 'beneficiary', they are 'passivated' (van Leeuwen, 2008). 'Victims' and 'community' are forms of 'identification' in terms of what they are in association to floods, while 'beneficiary' represents them as recipients of the NGO's goals/service. In this way, they passivate the community. They see the community as having little role in flood mitigation and as recipients of aid from NGOs. Besides that, their use of the term 'community' to represent the flood affected community indicates a homogenous group of people with similar needs and assistance, which is a form of collectivization (Van Leeuwen, 2008). Therefore, the community is represented as a group of people belonging together through their associations as 'victims', and beneficiaries which remove all agency from the community, thus passivating them. In this way, they employ a **discourse of victimization** and overlook the possibilities that communities can be empowered and do in actual fact play an active role in flood mitigation. Respondents recall in the following examples:

*We have to be a good listener to listen to the victims' problems when they are in trauma (NGO 3, lines 144-145).*

*Volunteers cannot make promises to the beneficiary (NGO 2, line 276).*

*We will help to cook for the community (NGO 3, line 123).*

## IMPACT OF DISCOURSES ON NGOs RESPONSE AND ACTION TO FLOOD DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

Our study is based on Aragon-Durand's (2009) view that how people represent a disaster, shapes and influences their response and action to the disaster. Based on our findings, the NGO officials draw upon the *discourses of act of man* and *act of nature* when talking about flood causation. They evoke the *discourses of teamwork* and *humanitarian* when representing their involvement and action during floods. They employ a *discourse of victimization* when constructing the community as victims and beneficiaries. The discourses are discussed in the following paragraphs.

When NGO officials talk about the causes of floods, they draw upon two main discourses, namely 'act of nature' and 'act of man'. Respondents recall phrases such as '*weather, drainage system and development and condition of the river*'. They talk of floods as caused by others by giving agency to development and nature. Thus, the blame is on these two factors which they have no control over. Both these discourses draw upon the idea that flood is caused by external factors which they are not responsible for. They do not talk about their role in solving the problems of flood causation, i.e. preventative measures; they only focus on the causes of the floods, thus their response to floods is also aligned with the causes of the floods as what they can do after the flood has happened. This also explains the concerns stated by Luna (2001) and Chan et al. (2019), that Malaysia's strategies for FDRR focus more on relief and rehabilitation in the post flood phase, rather than on preparedness at the pre-flood phase.

NGOs provide services in order to support the recovery of the community after a disaster. One of the conventional activities thus is providing humanitarian assistance to those affected by the disaster. Humanitarian responses are highly important to a catastrophic event. They play a significant role in providing assistance such as donating emergency relief and raising funds. In this way, they are part of the major delivery mechanism of humanitarian assistance. They work along with national government, seen as the one who is mainly responsible for actions on the ground. As NGOs are the key recipients of funds from outside donors, they help to distribute the funds to the needy (Rysaback-Smith, 2015). They thus, evoke a humanitarian discourse when they talk about their roles in flood disaster mitigation and management. Phrases such as '*humanity*' and '*humanitarian assistance*' are used by the respondents. And they also refer to themselves as '*volunteers*', a common reference by NGOs. Shaguravo et al. (2016) explain that volunteers in most organizations are guided by secular humanist values such as helping others, doing the good deed and etc. Therefore, humanist values have become a conventional value motivation for NGOs to provide their service.

In a similar vein, Papadakis (2004) adds that volunteering has a specific significance in the social environment and is seen as a special form of human activity aimed at positive social change through various humanitarian supports for the society members. Shaguravo et al., (2016) further explain that volunteering employs various principles such as humanity, humanism, selflessness, dedication and so on. The principle of humanity assumes that a volunteer is prepared to be involved in any action or activity that focuses on the resolution of the hard situations of a particular group. Humanity accepts accountability to protect those who are vulnerable to disasters. The basic principle of humanitarian aid is to lessen the sufferings of the disaster community without the interference of religion, politics or race. Humanity as a key value acts as the spirit of solidarity with the community. As volunteers who provide humanitarian assistance in terms of relief and emergency, they see those they help as victims of the disaster, via the use of the humanitarian discourse. In this way, this discourse also helps to elevate the identity of NGOs as those called upon to provide aid and

services to those in need. According to Osa (2013), volunteers believe that by involving in human welfare, they can be Good Samaritans and achieve a fulfilling sentiment. Despite the difficult situation, they continue their service in volunteering. Thus, being humanitarian becomes the mission for volunteers/ NGOs to continue with their services.

The NGO officers employ the discourse of teamwork when they talk about their roles in FDRR. Respondents use noun, 'team' and pronoun, 'we', 'us' and 'our' when they talk about their organizations. They represent themselves as a group of people, which is a form of 'collectivization' that refers to a homogeneous group of people with a similar goal (van Leeuwen, 2008). Larkin (2010) highlighted that teamwork within and between teams is an ethical effort in disaster situations. He added that the success of NGOs in disaster relief and mitigation and operations is dependent on teamwork that is committed to a common goal. Thus, teamwork will be unsuccessful when team members hold different goals. Teamwork allows for participation of all the team members in a situation where they can provide their service. Generally, individuals and groups become more interconnected through working together to overcome disaster-induced challenges than in 'normal' times (Tarricone & Luca, 2002). As an example, the leader of the NGO team gathers people from different fields such as medicine, logistic, management and others to handle the flood situations. One of the important roles of NGOs is thus, providing manpower and expertise from different fields. When people from different fields work together in flood situations, teamwork are formed and this becomes a highlight of the response and action among NGOs.

As Larkin (2010) explains, among the many skills, teamwork skill is a significant expertise learned by volunteers, thus they will be provided with various skills, abilities, and knowledge to disaster response and recovery efforts. They have to display this teamwork skill effectively during flood situation in order to carry out their tasks properly and efficiently. They do not make individual decisions in FDRR. Decisions are made collectively with the agreement and discussion with other members of the NGOs as flood situations are not a situation for them to show heroism, as only teamwork and cohesion can alleviate the suffering and burden. According to Sahni (2001), the quality of NGO involvement depends on the coordination and teamwork of different inter-sectional and inter-departmental units as disaster situation can be at multiple levels. Volunteers are given the training to work together with others when coming to a disaster situation or community project. The strength of NGOs depends on the strength and coordination of their members. Hence, through teamwork, every team member shares responsibilities. Teamwork contributes to the enhancement of emergency management quality through effective coordination and communication with all relevant social actors involved in flood situations. Discourse of teamwork therefore, is used when talking about the roles and duties that aligned with the identity and goals of the organization.

A discourse of victimization is drawn upon when talking about the communities being helped. This constructs the communities as passive, vulnerable and dependent on the aid provided by NGOs. While NGOs are represented as the good people who have been called on to help those in need, the communities are viewed as helpless, dependent and without agency. In most cases, communities in flood risk areas are anything but dependent and helpless. As Kangabam et al. (2012) explains, community members are the first group of people affected by the consequence of a disaster, and the first to act. There are countless ways in which they act even before others such as NGOs arrive with aid during floods, such as moving things to higher grounds, putting up barriers, cleaning up after the floods, etc. Most of the time, the officials represent members of the flood-prone community are as the receivers of aid, as beneficiaries and victims, as if they are just waiting for help to arrive. This manner of 'misrepresentation' of the community can be attributed to the traditional framework of relief and rehabilitation practiced in Malaysia by the government and NGOs. This measure that

focuses on activities in the during and post flood phases such as rescue, evacuation, mass feeding, etc are known as ‘dependency type relief measures’ (Luna, 2001). Thus, NGOs draw on a discourse of victimization because of their orientation to the traditional framework of relief and rehabilitation that views flood risk communities as victims and beneficiaries. In this way, they focus on their roles and duties and give less importance to how communities can play a bigger role in FDRR.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, we set out to investigate how members of NGOs talk about their involvement in flood disaster preparedness via discourses of flood disaster, and how the discourses shape and influence their response and action in FDRR in Johor. Our findings show that when they talk about their understanding of flood causation, they employ the discourses of act of man and act of nature. They mainly highlight that rapid development and unpredictable weather are the reasons for flood occurrences which they have no control over, and thus their roles are limited to relief and rehabilitation in the during and post flood periods. Apart from that, NGOs employ a humanitarian discourse and discourse of teamwork when talking about their roles.

Humanity is a motivation concept for volunteers to work during the disaster. As volunteers, they fully understand that they are involved in the flood mitigation program to help the affected communities. They also see teamwork as being vital in helping others. They have to act collaboratively in order to achieve the common goals of their organization. These discourses mainly focus on their organizations’ identities, roles and mission. They thus, highlight who they are and what they do in relation to the organization they are a part of. They do not however, see communities as playing an integral role in FDRR. They draw on a discourse of victimization that represents flood risk communities as victims and beneficiaries due to the traditional framework of relief and dependency practiced in Malaysia.

Undertaking a Critical Discourse Analysis of flood disaster preparedness does not only entail looking at the discourses that are drawn on by the actors, it also necessitates unveiling what discourses are missing. One main discourse that is excluded in the ‘talk’ of the officials of the NGOs is a ‘communitarian discourse’ (Sandaran, 2008) that sees collective action, also known as ‘collective resilience’ (Drury, 2012), of flood prone communities as the first responders during flood disaster. The officials from NGOs give little importance to building relationships with the communities as partners in flood disaster preparedness or of communities taking some level of ownership and charge of the recovery of flood disaster. Closely related to the communitarian discourse are the discourses of ‘empowerment’ and ‘resilience’ which are also missing and this can again be attributed to the main frame of relief and rehabilitation that is integral to flood disaster mitigation and management in Malaysia. As Chan et al., (2019) explain the dependency type framework that focuses on distributions of donations and provisions are short term charitable measures that emphasize dependency and helplessness rather than community empowerment and resilience. Thus, providing assistance for flood-prone communities every time when floods happen is not the only solution.

While our findings show that NGOs perceive flood risk communities as helpless and dependent and give less importance to creating resilient communities, we must add that this could also be due to the specific roles of the NGOs such as providing medical relief for example. There may be other NGOs who focus on providing training for community empowerment in line with the goals of that particular organisation. We would like to assert however, that as NGOs are a main service provider during the floods, all NGOs should make developing resilient communities a priority because they are directly involved with the

communities and thus also shape and influence the thinking and perceptions of the flood risk communities. They need to encourage flood prone communities to take part in disaster learning where their consciousness, knowledge and skills can be improved. The framework that draws on a participatory approach needs to be adopted in disaster-related activities where the involvement of the community becomes more intense. This could involve focusing on basic preparedness over the years to advance level of preparedness that includes hands-on training, emergency communication and response, neighbourhood response team and so on. To get a more detailed understanding of NGO perceptions, we recommend undertaking a future study that looks at a larger sample of NGOs to identify their representations of community in correlation with their goals and roles.

To conclude, a community empowerment program, i.e. Community-Based Disaster Preparedness that provides education and public awareness programmes for the local community is one of the most efficient methods for a nation in disaster preparedness. Community awareness on disaster preparedness is a practice of teaching and empowering the people via information and knowledge sharing on different types of disasters and their possible hazards. Through a community participation program, the community can change to a self-reliant community. In addition, through community empowerment programs, we can change the perceptions, beliefs, attitude, etc and consequently the discourses of flood disaster employed by the various actors such as NGOs and communities. When we are able to change their talk/discourses, we can change their thinking over a period of time (Kangabam *et al.*, 2012). To this end, we need to introduce new discourses such as discourses of empowerment, communitarian and ‘responsibilization’ for “a paradigm shift from perceiving the community as victims to survivors...to utilize the inner strengths and resources of the community to rebuild the community after a disaster into a resilient and sustainable community” (Van Krieken *et al.*, 2017:865).

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