

Covid-19 a wake-up call for waqf institutions

By [Dr Nor Asiah Mohamad](#) - June 7, 2020 @ 11:36am



In Malaysia, there is a specific institution entrusted to manage waqf. We lack perhaps the access to the assistance, and the impactful initiatives and publicity of various aid to the public. - BERNAMA file pic

THE Covid-19 pandemic came with many stories to share and observations worth noting. It teaches us, the young and the elderly, the sick and the healthy, the rich and the poor as well as the leaders and the people, many facets of facts of life.

At the beginning of the pandemic, some people seemed helpless due to an unexpected experience. The new normal and the loss of incomes have caused many to be miserable due to the Movement Control Order (MCO).

The media also reported a case where a policeman found a couple with a young child sitting in a park helplessly for not having enough food and supplies in their house.

Sadly, they did not know where and who to turn to. Some of us might have received calls or messages soliciting for help in cash or in kind. These stories and news reports remind me of a line of notes in "Rihlah of Ibn Batutah", a book that shares stories of Ibn Batutah in his journey to Makkah.

When he was in Damascus, he narrated stories relating to waqf (Islamic Endowment). One of them has a lesson for us to reflect and react on during this pandemic. It is about how a waqf institution manages to ease the grief and burden of a person without having to face many procedures or red tape.

Ibn Batutah related that he passed a young servant who had dropped a Chinese porcelain dish which broke into pieces. The servant was upset and a number of people around him suggested that he gather the pieces and take them to the custodian of the endowment for utensils.

He did as suggested. The custodian, whose post is equivalent to waqf manager or the Mutawalli, saw the broken pieces and gave money to the servant to buy a new one as a replacement.

This benefaction is really an eye opener. Waqf services accessible to the public with not much hassle or procedures, no red tape and reliable. Although the value or the volume of the assistance is not immense, the services are easily accessible for society.

Waqf refers to an act of giving for charity in perpetuity where the benefits of the charitable acts shall be enjoyed by others forever. It is different from donation or sodaqah (Islamic charity), since the subject matter of the waqf shall be entrusted to a trustee or custodian with a duty to generate income, increase the value and sustain the properties so that the benefits shall be enjoyed by the beneficiaries forever.

In Damascus, Ibn Batutah recorded that the types and expenditure of waqf were beyond computation. There were waqf institutions that provided help for a person who cannot undertake haj, waqf to pay dowry for the poor to get married, to help travellers, education and many more.

The various types of waqf are also in practice in Turkey, which can be easily emulated by the government, private sector or even individual in Malaysia. In Damascus, Ibn Batutah also reported there were 10 endowments by the Sultan, 11 by the court officials, 25 by merchants, 43 by members of the 'ulama' and 82 by the military officials.

Obviously, waqf activities were once championed by the middle class. It shows a great awareness on how to give back to society a portion of what they earn in line with the teaching of Islam (Al Quran 2:261; Al Quran 57:7). Interestingly, even non-Muslims can contribute and become the beneficiary of waqf.

In Malaysia, there is a specific institution entrusted to manage waqf. We lack perhaps the access to the assistance, and the impactful initiatives and publicity of various aid to the public.

God-willing, with good hands managing the properties, the system shall prosper to ease the burden of the unfortunates. Let us start somewhere; educate, initiate, imitate and spread the benefits.

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