

# 'GOVT INVESTMENT IN BALING VITAL'

Important for govt agencies to streamline initiatives to help villagers rebuild, says expert

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**R**EBUILDING the lives of farmers in Kampung Iboi whose livelihoods were destroyed in the massive floods on July 4 will require government investment in different business models.

Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Centre (DPPC) director Dr Khamarrul Azahari Razak

said it was important for government agencies to work cohesively to help villagers get back on their feet.

"To build a resilient community, the villagers need financial assistance from the government for their businesses.

"Government agencies need to cooperate to streamline initiatives to help farmers here."

He was speaking at a workshop on rebuilding a sustainable community, jointly organised by the Malaysian Medical Relief Society (Mercy) and DPPC recently.

The workshop was attended by farmers and breeders in Kampung Iboi and adjacent villages whose livelihoods were affected by the worst flood disaster in the Kupang sub-district.

At the workshop, Khamarrul and experts from UTM, Universiti Putra Malaysia and Universiti

Utara Malaysia spoke about effective tools that could be adopted to help rebuild sustainable communities in disaster-hit areas.

Khamarrul said the first challenge in rebuilding a sustainable community was changing people's perception of rivers, which had become a source of fear.

"We want to remind people that rivers are the source of their livelihood.

"It is normal in the early stages of recovery for victims to develop a fear of rivers, especially after suffering such devastation from the floods," said Khamarrul, who is also an executive council member of Mercy.

He said the workshop aimed to provide a platform for farmers to share ideas on ways to rebuild their lives after the disaster.

"At the workshop, experts will share their experience in working

with communities that faced similar circumstances."

He said it was crucial to share the success stories of communities that rebuilt their lives after a disaster.

"Based on our assessment, most of the farmers here have lost up to 70 per cent of their livelihoods following the disaster.

"It is important to help them believe that all is not lost. We need to guide them to rebuild their livelihoods and prepare them for future risks."

Khamarrul said the key to the rebuilding process was providing guidance to farmers on how they can maximise idle land and the resources around them.

"Bear in mind that 60 per cent of agricultural land face the risk of natural disasters.

"We have divided the land into zones based on severity of the dis-

aster risk: hazard, risky and safe.

"We hope farmers and breeders will be able to rebuild their livelihoods and minimise the destruction in the event of a disaster."

He said the recovery process required active participation from young farmers.

He said this was in line with the state's structural plan that marked Baling, specifically Kupang, as an agricultural area.

Kampung Iboi Village Development and Security Committee secretary Mohamad Nor Che Husain lauded the workshop.

"Villagers have been facing challenges since the river became polluted due to logging in Gunung Inas, which started more than a decade ago.

"We need all the help and guidance we can get because we have not suffered such a huge disaster before."