

# Volunteering with the Orang Asli Community in Gerik, Perak:

## A PROFESSIONAL REFLECTION

By Dr. Nursyuhada Azzman

Edited by Dr. Aisyah Hasyila Jahidin

### *Advancing Rural Health Equity!*

On 6<sup>th</sup> December 2025, I joined a volunteer outreach program organised by HOPE Worldwide Malaysia and sponsored by Boston Scientific, held in Desa Ria, Gerik, Perak, to support the Orang Asli community. The initiative brought together healthcare professionals and volunteers with the shared goal of providing medical services and strengthening community engagement. As a pharmacist, my role was to dispense medications and counsel patients on their proper use, ensuring that treatments were understood and followed safely and effectively.



The day began early, with our team departing from Butterworth at 7:20 a.m. Along the way, we collected breakfast before arriving at the Gerik Jetty at approximately 10:30 a.m. From there, we boarded a boat to Desa Ria, reaching the settlement around 11:30 a.m.

### *A new beginning....*

The ride across Tasik Banding was serene; however, I noticed that a large number of bark and branches were visible on the water's surface. The boat driver explained that this was due to Tenaga Nasional Berhad (TNB) adjusting the dam gates, causing the water level to drop and exposing submerged vegetation.



## *Where Sustainability Meets Service*



The experience served as a brief reminder of the delicate balance between development and environmental sustainability. While the Temengor Dam plays an important role in energy generation, its operations also bring environmental challenges. Fluctuations in water levels can affect local ecosystems and the livelihoods of nearby communities, including the Orang Asli. Such changes can influence daily life, affecting fishing, transportation, and access to essential resources. While dams provide clean energy and flood protection, they also highlight the delicate balance between development, environmental sustainability, and community well-being. By the time we arrived at Desa Ria, the focus shifted from environmental reflections to the purpose of our mission. Supplies were unloaded, and preparations began for the medical check-up sessions. Dispensing medications and counselling patients were not simply clinical duties; they became opportunities to build trust and empower individuals with knowledge about their health. The gratitude expressed by the Orang Asli underscored the importance of accessible healthcare in rural and underserved areas. Beyond medical services, HOPE Worldwide Malaysia and Boston Scientific also distributed food supplies to more than 200 families. Providing essential food items helped ease daily struggles and played a crucial role in strengthening food security and improving overall household well-being in the village.

## *From Service to Celebration*

After the sessions concluded and photographs were taken to commemorate the day, the team departed for Castella Café at around 4:30 p.m. The shared meal provided a moment of fellowship and reflection among volunteers, allowing us to appreciate both the challenges and rewards of the day. The day ended on a high note, concluding a journey that was both professionally fulfilling and personally enriching.

## *Reflections on Community Outreach and Collaboration*

This outreach program demonstrated the impact of volunteerism in bridging healthcare gaps and reaffirmed the importance of collaboration between organisations, sponsors, and volunteers. It also underscored the role of empathy and communication in ensuring that medical interventions translate into lasting health benefits. At the same time, the journey across Tasik Bandeding reminded me of the complex relationship between human development and the environment. The dam provides energy security, yet it also reshapes ecosystems and livelihoods. The experience was more than a medical mission. It was a journey of compassion, collaboration, and awareness of the interconnectedness between healthcare, community, and the environment.

Volunteering in Desa Ria, Gerik, served as a reminder that even small acts of service can have a lasting impact. When we choose to give our time and skills, we not only uplift others but also discover renewed strength and purpose within ourselves.