



Drivers of Recovery: Tsunami Reconstruction in Aceh, Indonesia, Three Years On

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Abstract

The Boxing Day 2004 tsunami claimed over 165,000 lives in Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam, Indonesia, and displaced more than 500,000 people. Over 141,000 houses were damaged or destroyed, along with nearly all infrastructure and public facilities in coastal areas. Over 600,000 people lost their means of livelihood. The international response has been unprecedented: over US\$5 billion has been committed by governments, international finance organisations and NGOs to assist the recovery effort. More than 180 international NGOs and 50 multilateral and bilateral agencies are operating in Aceh, involving thousands of expatriate and local staff and contractors. Meanwhile, the 30-year conflict between the Indonesian military and the Free Aceh Movement has ended, and a new Law on Government in Aceh accords the province far greater autonomy and a greater share of revenues from its abundant natural resource endowments.

There have been many successes; all victims have been provided shelter, health care and generally better government services than they experienced prior to the tsunami. There have been serious problems as well, most particularly involving replacement of housing stock and reviving productive activities in rural areas where most people live.

The Aceh Community Assistance Research Project (ACARP) is a multi-agency study of local capacity and aid effectiveness conducted in 18 villages in three of the most affected districts of Aceh. The study emphasises community members' perceptions of what works, and what doesn't. Women's participation, leadership, consultative processes, transparency, accountability and land rights emerge as important factors contributing to or delimiting the success of recovery programs.

Keywords: tsunami, development, recovery, governance, social capital, Indonesia, Aceh

Introduction

The Aceh Community Assistance Research Project (ACARP) is a multi-donor supported qualitative social research project, aimed at identifying and better understanding the factors that support and constrain recovery and redevelopment in communities in Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam in the wake of the Boxing Day 2004 earthquake and tsunami. Field research was undertaken by a group of 27 Acehnese social researchers over a three-month period in 18 tsunami-affected villages in the districts of Aceh Barat, Aceh Jaya and Aceh Besar, led by a team of senior researchers from Banda Aceh, Jakarta and Australia.

ACARP Research Project Objectives:

1. To identify key organic and external factors that influenced the success of communities in rebuilding their lives;
2. To study the factors and conditions that contributed to the re-establishment and successful engagement of local community capabilities in the wake of major upheaval from natural disaster and conflict;
3. To document and analyse the interaction between communities and external agencies in the reconstruction and recovery process highlighting community perceptions of progress, constraints and the value of external assistance; and
4. To train an alumni of Acehese researchers in sound social research methodologies, and to build momentum for continuing social research initiatives and evaluative projects in Aceh.

The 18 villages where field research was conducted were selected in matched pairs, from nine subdistricts in the three districts most severely impacted by the tsunami. In each pair, one of the villages appears to be experiencing more successful recovery than its counterpart.

Each village has its own story to tell, with specific composites of assets and constraints, achievements and frustrations. The analysis focuses both on the distinctions and diversity, as well as the commonalities between communities' experiences.

Comparing and contrasting the findings from the different villages generated a set of conclusions and recommendations, which in addition to finding immediate application in the context of Aceh's ongoing recovery, can be used for appraisal and planning in other post-disaster and post-conflict recovery situations in developing countries throughout the world.

Research Methods**Research questions:**

- What social, economic and governance institutions have emerged in earthquake and tsunami-affected villages during two-and-a-half years of recovery, and what is the state of village communities' capacity to overcome problems and rebuild their lives?
- What donor and government intervention strategies have most effectively supported local communities' reconstruction efforts?

The core activity of the ACARP research project was four weeks intensive field research by teams of three Acehese researchers in 18 villages – six each in the districts of Aceh Barat, Aceh Jaya and Aceh Besar. The research process involved an iterative, 'rolling' design, with frequent field testing, analysis and modification of tools and methods.

Social Research Training Course

Twenty-seven researchers were recruited or nominated by sponsoring agencies, followed by an intensive two-week social research training course provided in conjunction with the Aceh Research Training Institute at Syiah Kuala University. All of the researchers were Acehese, and each brought with them some experience working with communities in post-tsunami Aceh, although not much of this in a social research capacity. All had at

least a Bachelor level education, 12 of these in social science, with the remainder from a variety of backgrounds including agriculture and animal husbandry, architecture, civil engineering, economics, chemistry, biology and English.

Training curriculum included:

- Concepts of social research
- Quantitative and qualitative methods and data
- Overview of quantitative and qualitative social research techniques
- Combining quantitative and qualitative research
- Interview and focus group discussion facilitation techniques
- Field notes and recording
- Rapid and participatory assessment methods and techniques
- Researching gender

Technical skills taught during the training included:

- Designing and using questionnaires
- Structured and semi-structured interviews
- Focus group discussions
- Participant observation
- Researching and writing village histories
- Researching and writing case studies/life histories
- Data processing, coding, and writing

Much of the second week of the training was spent developing and refining the interview guide and research outline, based on the trainees' trials of various techniques and instruments. The social research training and methodology guide developed during this training course will be published in Indonesian by ARTI. The guide focuses on the following themes:

- Social cohesion and inclusion
- Social and political participation
- Decision-making processes
- Key actors, individuals, networks and institutions
- Access to services and resources, including government, donor, NGO and other sources
- Household subsistence strategies and fulfilment of basic needs
- Equity
- Security and wellbeing

The ACARP research ultimately sought to ascertain and record village community members' *own perceptions* regarding 'what matters', 'what works', and why.

Site Selection

With input from the sponsoring agencies, a list of around 20 'matched pairs' of proximate villages was prepared, from thirteen subdistricts in the districts of Aceh Besar, Aceh Jaya and Aceh Barat, which comprise the worst affected areas in the province outside the capital city, Banda Aceh. Each pair of villages, from the same subdistrict, shared many characteristics – such as their socioeconomic profile, means of livelihood, and level of tsunami damage. Various village typologies were sought, including primarily agricultural and fishing villages, relocation villages, peri-urban communities, and villages in areas that

had been heavily impacted by the conflict. In each pair, one village appeared to be faring better than the other, i.e., recovery programs there were more successful and people more content. The categories '*Bangkit*' ('Awakening') and '*Pra-Bangkit*' ('Pre-awakening' or problematic) villages were devised as an heuristic device to guide the selection process, and provide a basis for comparison. Indicators of '*bangkit*' status might include the existence of *warung* (small shops or stalls) and other small businesses, a resumption of religious and other cultural activities, existence of sport facilities and activities, and evidence of community self-help initiatives, such as a *meunasah* or *musholla* build by the community themselves, without outside assistance.¹

Based on logistical, political and other practical considerations, the initial list was narrowed to the final 18 villages (nine pairs), consisting of six villages (three pairs) each from the districts of Aceh Barat, Aceh Jaya and Aceh Besar. The final list includes a number of primarily agricultural and/or fishing villages, also mixed economy, peri-urban, relocation, and extremely isolated villages.

Fieldwork

Upon completion of the training, the researchers were divided into nine teams of three members each. Formation of teams considered gender balance, leadership, and effective distribution of skills and attributes. Each team was assigned a Team Leader. Teams were assigned villages by lottery. Each of the teams conducted research in one of the matched pairs of villages. Half the teams went first to the '*bangkit*' village of their pair, the other half started in the '*pra-bangkit*' village. Mobilisation included the provision of equipment including laptop computers, generators and mattresses.

The research teams met first with local government and community leaders to introduce the project and themselves, and collect important contextual and background information. This was followed by an intensive two-week period of formal and informal interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation. Groups were given targets for different sorts of data, i.e., 30 household questionnaires per village, 20 interviews, and at least five focus group discussions. Sampling methodology for the household surveys was split – 50 percent random sampling, with the remainder employing a sort of 'opportunistic random stratified sampling' approach, targeting particular segments of the community identified with the assistance of key informants such as the LOGICA Village Facilitator and local formal and informal leaders. These segments included female-headed and single parent households, orphans, landless families and households that had lost most or all of their land and means of livelihood, i.e., the 'new poor'. Researchers were also encouraged to identify subjects for a number of family histories and case studies that represented the experiences of each community.

Each team received at least two visits from a 'roving team' of senior researchers during the course of their field research, who in addition to providing guidance to the research teams on both methodological and logistical matters, also recorded their own observations and insights to add to the project database.

After two weeks in the first village, the teams reassembled in Banda Aceh, for two weeks of writing, discussion and review. The ACARP Senior Research Advisor facilitated this process, using the opportunity to assure that targets were being met, look for gaps or shortcomings in the design or implementation, and discuss strategies with team members

¹ As the research progressed, these categories were largely abandoned, as the distinctions between '*bangkit*' and '*pra-bangkit*' villages became blurred and indistinct. These designations were more useful in terms of initial site selection, than as analytical categories once data began to accrue.

to assure more complete coverage during the second round of village surveys. In a few instances, the teams were encouraged to return to their first villages briefly during the second village visit, to clear up certain matters, cover gaps in the data, or follow through on particularly interesting or vexing questions.

The teams then returned to the field, for two weeks repeating the exercise in the second of their paired villages. At the end of the second mobilisation, the group reassembled in Banda Aceh. Senior research advisors were present for this three-week period of transcription and review, and beginning in the second week, facilitated daily presentations and discussions, each day featuring a different team and pair of villages. Interview and focus group transcripts were coded using numeric headings from the research guide to assist with initial collation and analysis. By this time, the questionnaire data had been tabulated, and preliminary results provided more material for group discussion among the research team.

Field research outputs include the following:

- 533 household questionnaires
- 298 interview transcripts
- 54 focus group discussion transcripts
- 35 case studies
- 52 family histories
- 18 village profiles

Questionnaire respondents were 42 percent female, while interviewees were 30 percent women, and focus group participants 34 percent. Transcripts range in length from one to thirteen pages. The 18 village profiles were prepared by the field research teams during the final recording and analysis session in Banda Aceh, based on interview and observation data, combined with information from a variety of secondary sources gathered from government, donor and NGO sources. These were the primary embarkation point for the preparation of this report.

As well, the project collected over 100 documents from Indonesian government and donor, NGO and program contractors of various programs, consisting of proposals, work plans, reports and monitoring and evaluation data and reports.

Two enumerators and a data analyst were engaged to assist in the processing of data collected during fieldwork, utilizing appropriate quantitative and qualitative data management and analysis software. The Senior Research Advisor was responsible for preparation of the final report, which is being published by AusAID and UNDP.

Research Results

In keeping with the community-based focus of this study, findings and analysis are confined to micro-level issues that can be assessed and addressed at the local community level. Findings can be organised into three broad groupings: Governance, Livelihoods, and Village Infrastructure and Housing.

Governance

a. Leadership

- i. Local leadership presents as the key determining factor differentiating more successful from less successful village recovery.

- ii. The role and character of *Keucik* (Village Head) is particularly important in Acehnese communities, with communities expressing a clear preference for *Keucik* who facilitate, rather than control, government affairs and recovery program implementation.
 - iii. Depth and breadth of village leadership is another key determinant, with villages where leadership teams have coalesced performing better than those led by a single figure.
 - iv. Factionalism and rivalries within communities and their leadership structures can seriously impede recovery efforts, and result in uneven and inequitable allocation of aid benefits.
 - v. Communities where ex-GAM combatants or leaders have been incorporated into the village government apparatus benefit from increased unity, motivation and overall effectiveness of recovery efforts.
 - vi. Village development cadre can serve a useful role in mobilising and supporting recovery programs, provided they are well selected, trained and supported.
 - vii. Village Facilitators provide invaluable support to both strengthening village government institutions through skills training and mentoring, also improved overall planning and coordination of village community recovery programs. Unhealthy dependencies can develop if the Facilitators do not undertake a methodical process of transferring skills and responsibilities to the appropriate village institutions and authorities.
- b. Decision-making and Problem Solving
- i. There is a strong correlation between frequent village meetings, and successful recovery program implementation plus a host of other positive social capital indicators.
 - ii. Conducive facilities for conducting meetings represent an important early priority in communities recovering from disaster.
 - iii. Skills training programs, both general communication, facilitation and decision-making techniques as well as more specialised training programs (e.g., land rights, inheritance and advocacy, gender awareness, conflict mediation) provide much-needed capacity building support for village community members and leaders.
 - iv. The establishment of dedicated project management committees for community-based projects and programs (e.g., small-scale infrastructure), accompanied by clear guidelines and procedures for inclusive planning and decision-making, participatory management and monitoring, and financial disclosure and accountability, can provide valuable examples and learning opportunities for communities, while acculturating these values and promoting their uptake by village government.
- c. Transparency and accountability
- i. Overall, there is a shift toward greater transparency and accountability of village government in Aceh, although there are communities where this is not yet taking place.

- ii. The ongoing process of direct village elections is supporting this shift – although again, there are examples where this process has been subverted.
 - iii. Villages with fully constituted village government structures demonstrate greater transparency and accountability than those still led by single figures or small cliques. The engagement and empowerment of customary and/or informal institutions in village recovery efforts also supports a more even balance of power and enhanced accountability.
 - iv. The approaches taken by donors and other aid delivery agencies can significantly impact the adoption of the values and institutions of transparent and accountable governance.
- d. Women's Participation
- i. The tsunami recovery effort has been accompanied by a perceptible increase in the level of women's formal participation in village community decision-making and recovery and development program management and implementation – although there are many villages where this is still clearly not the case.
 - ii. In villages that have formally adopted gender mainstreaming principles, these changes are enthusiastically embraced by many women and generally supported by the men of the community.
 - iii. In communities where women have yet to be formally incorporated into decision-making and governance structures and procedures, they are often actively involved in these affairs at the neighbourhood and household levels.
 - iv. Increased women's participation has yet to generate measurable impact on most other social capital or aid effectiveness indicators. This is probably due to the relatively small number of villages that have fully embraced gender mainstreaming principles, together with the fact that the process has been underway for a relatively short time. These links may become more pronounced with the passage of time (if these changes persist beyond the current donor-driven 'affirmative action' phase).
- e. Social Capital
- i. Social capital is generally quite strong in Acehnese society, and although seriously impacted by tsunami losses and trauma and aspects of the recovery process, forms an important asset supporting community recovery in tsunami-affected villages.
 - ii. There is a strong correlation between levels of mutual trust in communities, and both the character and quality of local leadership, and the frequency and tenor, or conduct, of community meetings.
 - iii. Communities that were able to physically and spatially reunite during the early phases of the recovery process are showing stronger and more rapid recovery than those where community members were dispersed across several different emergency accommodations.
 - iv. The early revival of religious and customary cultural practices, rituals and associations provides a vital foundation for rebuilding social capital in traumatised communities.

- v. Despite protestations to the contrary, the tradition and institutions of *gotong-royong* mutual assistance and voluntary service remain strong in many Acehnese communities. Quality and legitimacy of village leadership, rather than the frequency or duration of cash-for-work programs, appears to be the primary factor differentiating communities in this regard.
- vi. Successful implementation of community self-help projects (e.g., small-scale infrastructure or public facilities) considerably enhances community members' confidence and outlook, while building mutual trust and trust in leaders.

Livelihoods and Livelihood Support

- i. The average number of income earners per household is slightly lower than before the tsunami. Average household incomes, which dropped to zero in most cases in the wake of the tsunami, are now returning to (or in some cases exceeding) pre-tsunami levels although there is considerable variability within and between villages. In all villages surveyed, basic household needs are being fulfilled.
- ii. This recovery derives from a combination of factors, many of them temporary in nature (e.g., food aid and subsidies, casual work as labourers on construction projects, and the use or conversion of livelihood assistance for consumption purposes). Productive and 'normal' commercial activities are resuming, though still quite limited in scope and scale.
- iii. Factors such as location, relative level of tsunami destruction, and the existence of productive activities that can be easily rehabilitated or restored, have influenced the speed and trajectory of economic recovery in villages.
- iv. Single-parent and orphan-headed households generally own and earn less than other households in their communities.
- v. In the primary production sphere, activities that have shown good recovery are small-scale fisheries, rubber tapping and brick and other building material production.
- vi. Other agricultural production is hardly resuming in most areas, due to a combination of factors including tsunami sediment and debris that still covers fields, lack of irrigation and drainage, an increase in pest (rat and wild boar) populations, and the fact that nobody else is doing it. Many people choose not to resume farming while less strenuous and (in the short-run at least) less risky income-earning opportunities exist, that provide immediate returns to labour. A few small scale (e.g., household garden) programs have seen some successes in some villages.
- vii. It can therefore be surmised that most agricultural aid provided in the form of seeds, equipment, supplies and credit, has been premature (while most larger-scale inputs, such as field clearing and irrigation and drainage works, are taking too long).
- viii. Assistance to small-scale productive and commercial enterprise development, in the form of skills training, equipment and supplies, cash grants or loans, mentoring and technical support and marketing assistance, has shown uneven results. The following patterns are emerging:

- The majority of successful enterprise development grants and loans are those that have allowed individuals to re-establish enterprises they owned or managed prior to the tsunami (although there have been smaller numbers of successful start-up businesses as well).
 - Micro-enterprise and micro-credit programs targeting women produce higher success rates (in terms of the survival rate of businesses or funds) than their male counterparts.
 - Income derived from women's economic activities is more often used to support household and education expenses.
- ix. Large amounts of livelihood and economic development aid have been expended on household consumption, including the purchase of luxury goods.
 - x. The most common criticisms and complaints regarding livelihood and economic development aid focus on the quality or appropriateness of materials, equipment or stock provided, the lack of follow-up extension and support, and issues of targeting and equity.
 - xi. Engaging 'local experts' and local institutions in the planning, allocation, and management of livelihood assistance programs significantly increases their success rate.
 - xii. Investment in 'enabling facilities' and support infrastructure – both physical and institutional – represents a more cost-effective means of supporting local economic revival than providing grants or loans to individual producers, although a mixture of these two types of assistance is necessary to achieve optimal outcomes.

Housing and Infrastructure

- i. Housing reconstruction programs have been plagued by a variety of problems, manifesting in the villages as frustrating delays, confusion over the bewildering variety of styles and types of housings, lack of clear minimum standards, and inability of residents to evaluate the quality of services. These problems are exacerbated by poor coordination and poor communication between the housing providers and intended recipients.
- ii. Land acquisition and land ownership represent extremely complex issues that are complicating and frequently impeding housing reconstruction. In the ACARP survey villages, examples include:
 - The difficulty of some poorer residents in some villages to acquire new land on which to build houses (and concomitant ineligibility for housing assistance);
 - Delays in the construction of housing, facilities and infrastructure in certain relocation villages;
 - A case of the village *Keucik* selling family ID cards to 'outsiders', which affords them eligibility to receive housing assistance, at the expense of (or in preference to) the original inhabitants of that community;
 - Cases of single individuals receiving multiple houses; and

- The prospect of jealousy and friction arising over perceived inequities, particularly in cases where large numbers of new residents are settled in a village, or in villages where people whose houses were damaged have not received rehabilitation assistance, while those whose houses were destroyed have received new buildings.
- iii. Communities that received early temporary housing assistance that allowed them to return to their village or move into their relocation site have generally shown swifter progress in all facets of their recovery. This is obviously more likely when also accompanied by provision of basic amenities and services.
- iv. The small number of temporary or permanent housing construction programs that engaged local community members in planning and construction proceeded more quickly and experienced fewer complications than projects taking a 'turn-key' approach.
- v. The Timber for Aceh Initiative which discourages the use of locally harvested wood was not met with effective strategies to provide alternative building materials to Acehnese communities and families, further concentrating control of housing provision in the hands of NGOs and contractors.
- vi. Village Spatial Plans proven to be extremely beneficial in the small number of villages where these plans have been followed .
- vii. Small grants to communities to support infrastructure or public facilities, when accompanied by clear guidelines on participatory planning , transparent management and public disclosure of financial information, have proven to be an extremely cost effective means of delivering quality small -scale infrastructure not met by other donor or government projects, while significantly strengthening communities' capacity to plan and implement future self -help projects.

Discussion and Conclusions

Three years after the Boxing Day 2004 earthquake and tsunamis, Aceh still presents a complex reconstruction environment with enormous challenges. Rebuilding the shattered province is a Promethean task. There have been many problems, gaps, overlaps and shortcomings, alongside many remarkable success stories. Much has been achieved in the effort to rebuild Acehnese communities. Most of the transient poverty and suffering that was created by the tsunami has been alleviated, and the transition from emergency relief to longer-term reconstruction was rapidly achieved. Families have roofs over their heads, and enough food to eat. People in towns and villages are returning to work. Local and regional government agencies, gutted by the tsunami, are developing capacities to carry the process forward.

Thirty years of conflict left deep scars on Aceh. The 2005 Peace Agreement brought hope, and regional elections of 2006 and 2007 have given the Acehnese people a much greater say in the shape and direction they hope to see their future take. The new governor of Aceh, Irwandi Yusuf, has pledged to '*membangun Aceh dari gampong*' – rebuild Aceh from the village up. It will be a difficult task; in addition to the neglect and trauma of the past 30 years, Aceh has the reputation of having Indonesia's most corrupt and least effective government.

The recovery process, and the intensive inputs from national and international government and nongovernmental sources, has produced a sort of 'incubator' for new

democratic institutions of government. As the Dutch, and later the Indonesians have learned, Acehese are savvy political operators. The current post -tsunami situation is no different in this regard; communities and local leaders have quickly learned how to 'work the system' to their advantage, and have developed strategies and vocabularies that allow them to secure resources and power – within the specific context of recovery.

Many of the 'trends' identified in the body of this report – e.g., gender mainstreaming, democratic governance, etc. – are questionable. Three years is too short a time -span to constitute a 'trend'; what we are witnessing is more 'aid effect', that may disappear without a trace once the aid and concomitant incentives and rewards are no longer on offer, and pre-existing structures and relations are reasserted. One hopes not. All that can be said with any confidence, is that the tsunami and subsequent events has provided Aceh with an opportunity to initiate a transformation that only a few years ago, seemed totally beyond reach.

The year 2009 presents many special challenges to the people and government of Aceh. That is the year that the BRR will be decommissioned, and most of the recovery aid programs terminated. The transition from 'recovery' to 'development' will not have been fully achieved by this time – it is already clear that local communities and leaders intend to milk every last drop that can be had from recovery before moving on to some sort of new phase. Aid-driven inflation, and continuing concern about future security continue to suppress investment. The Acehese economy has no 'top end', and is unlikely to develop one anytime soon. The political and economic savvy that the Acehese have honed through decades of conflict and repression, combined with some of the more modern political skills, structures and vocabularies they learned during the tsunami recovery period, will all come into play as they negotiate this next crucial phase.

Key Lessons Learned:

- Full-time village community facilitators play a key role in helping communities to rebuild in the wake of catastrophic disasters .
- Communities that are able to return quickly to their settlement, or build new homes in permanent resettlement areas, fare much better than those that languish in barracks or temporary encampments .
- Cash-for-work is an effective means of supporting early recovery . It is important that these programs are implemented in a manner that does not distort local economies (i.e., wage levels kept at level of pre -disaster minimum wage), and that they have a clearly delimited time frame and strategy for transition to other forms of assistance once the initial emergency has passed.
- In the Acehese context, housing and small -scale infrastructure projects undertaken or managed by local communities show a much higher success rate than those taking a 'turn -key' approach.

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