

“Passive Recipients vs. Active Participants”

The Impact of the UN Cluster System on Coordination between International Relief Agencies and Locals during Disaster Response

Kathryn Sullivan

University Honors in International Studies

Capstone Advisor: Professor David Bosco, SIS: International Service

Spring 2013

Acronyms and Abbreviations

IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ERC	United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator
UN	United Nations
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
IO	International Organization
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNDAC	United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination
UNJLS	United Nations Joint Logistics Center
Bakornas	Indonesian National Disaster Management Board
ICRC	International Committee for the Red Cross
BRR	Aceh and Nias Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
TEC	Tsunami Evaluation Coalition
DEC	Disasters Emergency Committee
SCHR	Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
ACT	Action by Churches Together
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
HIC	United Nations Humanitarian Information Center
UNHAS	United Nations Humanitarian Air Service
GAM	Free Aceh Movement
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
PMI	Indonesian Red Cross/Red Crescent
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
GIS	Oxfam Geographic Information System
WFP	World Food Program

Abstract:

Though local organizations are typically the first responders to a disaster and offer unique skills and knowledge to the recovery process, they are often bypassed by larger international relief agencies. In 2005, the United Nations introduced the Cluster System, a new mechanism to coordinate the actions of relief actors during emergencies. This paper seeks to evaluate the impact of the Cluster System on coordination between local and international actors by focusing on sudden-onset natural disasters in Indonesia before and after the implementation of the Cluster System – the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami and the 2006 Yogyakarta Earthquake. Through the study of media reports during the disaster relief and recovery periods and program evaluations issued afterwards, the nature of the relationship between international relief agencies and local governments, local nongovernmental organizations, communities, and beneficiaries is compared for the two disaster responses. The research finds that coordination between international relief agencies and local actors was significantly stronger during the Yogyakarta relief effort, suggesting that the Cluster System has helped to improve that coordination. There are, however, several other factors that may explain this relationship. Additional case studies will therefore be required before the impact of the Cluster System on local-international relief coordination can be assessed with any certainty.

Introduction

When an earthquake strikes or a hurricane devastates a city, the first to respond are not soldiers in blue helmets or uniformed Red Cross workers. While such official “disaster responders” are scrambling to organize transportation to the affected region and gather the necessary supplies, it is very often those whose homes have been destroyed that are the first to come to the aid of their fellow victims. A man runs into the house next door, searching for the elderly woman who has trouble getting down the stairs; a family takes in the cousins whose home collapsed and who have nowhere else to go. From the first moments of a natural disaster affected communities are an invaluable part of the response.

Yet, once the uniformed teams arrive with rescue equipment and containers filled with tents, clothing, and food, the contributions of those first responders are often forgotten in the chaos. As they hurry around organizing logistics and setting up coordination meetings with other agencies, relief organizations often ignore the potential of these affected communities to help out in the response. In doing so, they deny themselves one of the most powerful tools available to them, and leave affected communities feeling weak and powerless.

Until recently even academic studies of disaster relief omitted this crucial group in their evaluations. Fortunately, the humanitarian aid community has increasingly recognized the importance of coordinating with affected populations and community. What remains to be seen, however, is just how much that community is able to transfer its written values to its actual relief practice, and what tools can help it to do so.

Literature Review

Despite the world’s long history of disasters, both natural and man-made, the study of those disasters and the response to them is actually rather young. Indeed, scholars only began to

examine such phenomena in earnest in the second half of the twentieth century, just as the international community began to create mechanisms to respond to those disasters. In the earliest days of the discipline, key disaster scholars including E.L. Quarantelli, Russell Dynes, and J. Eugene Haas, focused on how best to limit the human and economic destruction of disasters. Those studies were founded on C.E. Fritz's 1961 definition of a disaster as "[an] event, concentrated in time and space, in which a society... incurs such losses to its members and physical appurtenances that the social structure is disrupted..."¹ Such an understanding of disasters as primarily physical in nature meant that the study of those disasters was highly functional, focused on response and mitigation structures and procedures. This practical focus, which was also very much a result of high levels of government funding for disaster research, manifested itself in the research conducted at the National Hazards Center, founded by Gilbert White in the 1970s. The primary focus of that research was on policies that might mitigate damage from natural disasters, such as more careful building techniques and more precise building codes.²

As the study of disasters and disaster response progressed, scholars began to examine the behavior of a much larger group of actors. At the same time, scholars also began to split into several camps. One key point of division among those camps was their chronological focus. Under the Comprehensive Emergency Management model, promoted by the National Governor's Association, disaster research moved to focus more on post-disaster response and less on pre-disaster mitigation policies.³ In contrast, Dennis Mileti's Disaster-Resistant

¹ C.E. Fritz, "Disasters," in *Contemporary Social Problems: An Introduction to the Sociology of Deviant Behavior and Social Disorganization*, ed. Robert King and Robert A. Nisbet Merton (New York: Harcourt, 1961).

² Gilbert F. White, *Natural Hazards, Local, National, Global* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974).

³ David A. McEntire, Christopher Fuller David A. McEntire, Chad W. Johnston, and Richard Weber, "A Comparison of Disaster Paradigms: The Search for a Holistic Policy Guide," *Public Administration Review* 62, no. 3 (2002).

Community model, as described in his 1999 book, *Disasters by Design*, retained the earlier focus on pre-disaster planning and mitigation efforts. Scholars using this model focused on proper land-use planning, building codes, and warning systems, all of which were aimed at building communities able to respond to disasters without outside assistance.⁴

Notwithstanding these developments, change and growth in the disaster research field was unusually limited in its first half-century. As has been made clear, most debate in the field focused on whether to concentrate efforts on pre-disaster mitigation or post disaster response. Regardless of their position on that debate, however, early disaster scholars focused almost exclusively on the technical and logistical aspects of disaster prevention and response. Of course, from the very beginning of disaster research it was understood that natural disasters are not natural phenomena alone, but rather the intersection of those phenomena with humans and societies in a vulnerable state.⁵ Despite this long-held understanding, it was not until the beginning of the twenty-first century that disaster scholars really began to direct their research towards the social and organizational component of disasters. On one hand, this latest shift in the research has manifested itself in a call by academics (with Kathleen Tierney notable among them) for increased academic rigor in the study of how disasters affect populations, and how those effects are impacted by social differences and inequalities within those populations.⁶ Urged on by cases such as that of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005, many scholars have begun to more intensely study the disproportionate impact of natural disasters on

⁴ Dennis S. Mileti, *Disasters by Design: A Reassessment of Natural Hazards in the United States*. Washington, DC: Joseph Henry Press, 1999.

⁵ Greg Bankoff, "Comparing Vulnerabilities: Toward Charting an Historical Trajectory of Disasters," *Historical Social Research* 32, no. 3 (2007).

⁶ Kathleen J. Tierney, "From the Margins to the Mainstream: Disaster Research at the Crossroads," *Annual Review of Sociology* 33, (2007).

geographically, socially, or politically marginalized populations.⁷ At the same time, even those students of natural disasters who have retained the discipline's traditional practical focus have undergone a major shift in recent years. Many students of disaster management have adopted the Comprehensive Vulnerability Management paradigm supported by David McEntire, Christopher Fuller, Chad Johnston, and Richard Weber. Under this paradigm, which reflects an understanding of disasters as locally and socially determined, studies of disaster response focus not only on the timing of disaster management efforts but also on the scale of those efforts. McEntire and his colleagues recommend, "delegating authority to the local level..." and "encouraging self-reliance among the affected population."⁸ Increasingly, scholars of disaster relief are recognizing the capacity of local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), even those whose primary mandate is outside the development or service areas, to play an important role in relief operations, both as organizers and as links between affected individuals and relief organizations coming to the area after a disaster.⁹ This relocation of the nexus of disaster preparation and relief from the national and international levels to the community and local level is also supported by Eric Klinenberg's landmark study comparing mortality rates in different neighborhoods in Chicago during the heat wave that struck the city in 1995. That study found that neighborhoods with strong, pre-existing community organizations and networks had much lower mortality rates during the heat wave.¹⁰ Such compelling results have even led to a shift among policy makers, with what the US Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response,

⁷ Reid Basher, "Disaster Impacts: Implications and Policy Responses," *Social Research* 75, no. 3 (2008); Ilan Kelman Jessica Mercer, Kate Lloyd, Sandie Suchet-Pearson, "Reflections on Use of Participatory Research in Disaster Risk Reduction," *Area* 40, no. 2 (2007).

⁸ David A. McEntire, et. all. "A Comparison of Disaster Paradigms: The Search for a Holistic Policy Guide." *Public Administration Review* 62, no. 3 (2002): 273-274.

⁹ Eric Klinenberg, "Adaptation: How Can Cities Be "Climate-Proofed"?", *The New Yorker*, January 7, 2013 2013.

¹⁰ Eric Klinenberg, *Heat Wave: A Social Autopsy of Disaster in Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

Nicole Lurie, described as a large “evolution in thinking” from a traditional focus on disaster mitigation infrastructure to strengthening community based relief efforts.¹¹

Notwithstanding the recent academic shift towards community-level disaster response, international organizations continue to dominate large-scale humanitarian aid and disaster relief and will in all likelihood continue to do so in the future. There is thus merit in examining how those organizations and institutions have responded to this shift. There has been a great deal written by international relations scholars on the coordination between international organizations (IOs) and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) during and after natural disasters. This academic discussion has largely centered around two issues. The first is the humanitarian relief community’s continued use of early disaster paradigms to frame their response to natural disasters. As Randolph Kent and other scholars have described in detail, members of that community continue to reward “fixers,” and continue to focus on developing technical competencies at the expense of developing a deeper understanding of the causes of vulnerability.¹² Furthermore, those same scholars have critiqued the UN and other elements of the humanitarian community for their reactive, rather than preventative tendencies.¹³ The second focus of such studies has been the difficulty of coordination between organizations responding to natural disasters. Indeed, scholars such as Jock Stirrat, Larry Minear, Peter Hoffman, and Thomas Weiss have written extensively about the phenomenon of “competitive humanitarianism.” These scholars describe the long tradition of poor humanitarian coordination in the field as a result of competition among relief organizations for funding, media attention, and their very survival. This competition, in turn, leads to overlap and a bias towards post-

¹¹ Klinenberg, "Adaptation: How Can Cities Be "Climate-Proofed"?"

¹² Randolph Kent, "Coping with Disaster: A Challenge for International Institutions," *Harvard International Review* 28, no. 3 (2006).

¹³ Ibid.

disaster relief at the expense of preventative activities.¹⁴ Studies of this dilemma have made an effective case that the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), which is ostensibly charged with coordinating disaster response and reducing these negative effects, is structurally too weak to exercise significant control over competing relief efforts.¹⁵

Unfortunately, on the key issue of local involvement in disaster relief, these studies of international coordination fall short. Indeed, the vast majority of study of humanitarian coordination during natural disasters has been directed at coordination between IOs, INGOs, and governments. Local NGOs have been left out of the equation or, if they are discussed at all, have been mentioned only in passing. For example, in his article describing the competitive humanitarianism that plagues relief efforts, Stirrat briefly mentions that though local NGOs are the initial responders in disasters, they are often reduced to junior partners amidst competition among larger international aid agencies.¹⁶ Similarly other scholars such as Minear and Max Stephenson only mention these local NGOs as another group of actors adding to the confusion of humanitarian relief without going into further detail about their role or attempts made to work with them.¹⁷ In the few cases where these local NGOs are directly addressed, scholars treat them as David O'Brien does, as actors filling the relief gap prior to the arrival of international aid, rather than as they key components of disaster relief.¹⁸

Of course, there are exceptions to this trend. Mercer, Kelman, Lloyd, and Suchet-Pearson's paper on the use of participatory research in disaster studies emphasizes the

¹⁴ Jock Stirrat, "Competitive Humanitarianism: Relief and the Tsunami in Sri Lanka," *Anthropology Today* 22, no. 5 (2006).

¹⁵ Peter J. Hoffman and Thomas G. Weiss, *Sword & Salve: Confronting New Wars and Humanitarian Crises* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

¹⁶ Jock Stirrat, "Competitive Humanitarianism: Relief and the Tsunami in Sri Lanka," *Anthropology Today* 22, no. 5 (2006).

¹⁷ Max Stephenson, "Toward a Descriptive Model of Humanitarian Assistance Coordination," *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 17, no. 1 (2006).

¹⁸ David O'Brien, "Challenges to Making Humanitarian Action Work: The Indian Ocean Relief Effort in Contemporary Perspective," *Canadian Foreign Policy* 13, no. 1 (2006).

importance of incorporating indigenous knowledge into disaster risk reduction planning.¹⁹ Also notable among these exceptions is Graeme MacRae's analysis of the response to the May 2006 earthquake in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. In his article, MacRae reveals the failure of international agents responding to the disaster, overseen by OCHA, to preserve their stated priority of creating 'partnerships' with local NGOs. As, MacRae describes, during the relief operation, these goals were clearly put aside in favor of a speedy response.²⁰

However, such close studies of the relationships between international organizations and local NGOs in disaster relief operations are far from numerous. With the increased recognition by disaster scholars and even disaster management professionals of the importance of pre-existing local NGOs in disaster response, there is a need for more such analysis. Without a doubt, the study of international organizations and disasters would benefit greatly from more numerous and more rigorous case studies of the relationships between international organizations and local actors during natural disasters.

The Case Study: A Test of the UN Cluster System

This investigation proposes to further the study of coordination during humanitarian crises by examining the impact that international coordination mechanisms can have on the interactions between IOs responding to natural disasters and pre-existing NGOs and community organizations in the affected region. More specifically, this paper will examine the effect of the implementation of the most recent update to the UN Humanitarian Coordination System, the UN

¹⁹ Jessica Mercer, et al. "Reflections on Use of Participatory Research in Disaster Risk Reduction." *Area* 40, no. 2 (2007): 12.

²⁰ Graeme MacRae, "Could the System Work Better? Scale and Local Knowledge in Humanitarian Relief," *Development in Practice* 18, no. 2 (2008).

Cluster System, on the degree of consultation between international and local actors during emergency relief operations.

The UN Cluster System was certainly not the first formal attempt at humanitarian coordination. Indeed, prior to its introduction in 2005, there were many coordination mechanisms available to humanitarian actors and agencies. The highest-level of these mechanisms was the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) established by the UN in 1992. This committee, whose members represented many different UN agencies, was staffed by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and led by the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC). In the event of a natural disaster or other humanitarian emergency, OCHA would set up a UN country team to organize the UN response. This team would be responsible for handling needs assessments, preparedness, appeals and funding, security for UN employees, and the division of labor among UN agencies. At their core, however, the IASC and OCHA were designed to serve UN agencies, rather than the broader humanitarian community. As such, they were far from inclusive. Though the ICRC and other large INGOs might be invited to attend meetings from time to time, they had no voting power to affect the committee's decision.²¹

Largely excluded from the official UN system, INGOs relied on other coordination mechanisms to organize humanitarian responses. Larger agencies joined in membership organizations such as the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR), the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), and Interaction, all of which held observer status at the IASC. National Red Cross and Red Crescent societies worked together through the ICRC and the IFRC. There were also smaller groupings of agencies attempting to coordinate

²¹ Jon Bennett, "Coordination of International Humanitarian Assistance in Tsunami-Affected Countries," *Tsunami Evaluation Coalition* (2006): 28-29.

their humanitarian response efforts. In the United Kingdom, several donor agencies worked together through the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC). Other organizations coordinated their aid work through such groupings as Action by Churches Together (ACT) and the Caritas Network.²²

As part of its Humanitarian Reform Agenda, the UN instituted a new humanitarian coordination system in 2005. The Cluster System, which takes a slightly different form for each crisis to which it responds, groups humanitarian organizations (both inside and outside the UN system) into clusters. These clusters are divided along the primary sectors of humanitarian response, including water, health, and logistics. Within each cluster there is also an IASC designated Cluster Lead Agency that is responsible for leading the response within their cluster and is expected to serve as the primary contact point for the UN and the government of the affected country. Ultimately, the new system is intended to achieve five stated goals: building stronger partnerships among emergency relief actors; creating a “coherent and complementary approach among responders;” ensuring that the coordination structure is determined according to the local context; providing “a clear point of contact and accountability...between international humanitarian actors, national and local authorities, and civil society;” and encouraging strategic and operational coordination by both agency heads and program implementers.”²³ This new program, if fully implemented, thus held great potential to create a more inclusive humanitarian relief system and improve relationships between international relief agencies and the pre-existing structures in the communities those agencies seek to assist.

²² Jon Bennett, “Coordination of International Humanitarian Assistance in Tsunami-Affected Countries,” *Tsunami Evaluation Coalition* (2006): 28-29.

²³ “OCHA on Message: The Cluster Approach,” *OCHA* (2012)
https://ochanet.unocha.org/p/Documents/120320_OOM-ClusterApproach_eng.pdf.

In order to examine the Cluster System's impact on such local and international partnerships, this paper will conduct a case study of two major sudden onset natural disasters and the subsequent humanitarian response to those disasters. This study will compare the response to a natural disaster prior to the implementation of the Cluster System, the December 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami (specifically in Indonesia), and the response to another crisis after the Cluster System was put into effect, the May 2006 earthquake in the Yogyakarta Province of Indonesia. These two cases were selected from the rather limited set of significant sudden onset natural disasters in the hope that the many similarities between the two events will make it possible to ascertain the impact of the implementation of the Cluster System on the coordination of humanitarian relief. As the two disasters occurred in the same country, Indonesia, the national government, a key element of disaster coordination, is thus held more or less constant (with the exception of any changes that occurred in the government during the two and a half years between the disasters). Similarly, the two affected regions had a similar level of development and international involvement when the disasters struck.

Beyond the fact that both cases to be studied occurred in Indonesian, the disasters themselves were actually quite similar. Both the earthquake and the tsunami (which itself was the result of an undersea earthquake) were sudden onset disasters, such that there was no warning prior to their impact and thus no opportunity to prepare a response in advance. At the same time, within Indonesia, the disasters were also very similar in terms of scope. Though the number of Indonesians killed in the 2004 tsunami, 165,708, was significantly higher than the 5,778 who died in the Yogyakarta Earthquake, the earthquake's destruction actually reached many more

people.²⁴ Nearly three times the number of people who lost their homes in the 2004 tsunami was left homeless by the 2006 earthquake.²⁵

The study itself will focus on the response to these disasters by the international community and will carefully examine the interaction between IOs, between IOs and the Indonesian government, and between IOs and the affected population. It is this last set of relationships that will be the particular focus of the case studies. In each case, the paper will evaluate the interactions between IOs and pre-existing local NGOs, between IOs and community structures, and between IOs and individual beneficiaries in the hopes of measuring the amount and depth of coordination and consultation between these actors. These observations will then provide a more clear idea of the nature of the interaction between IOs and local actors before and after the institution of the UN Cluster System.

Case #1: The Indian Ocean Tsunami in Indonesia

The Indian Ocean Tsunami

When a 9.0 magnitude earthquake struck off the coast of Sumatra in the early hours of December 26, 2004, it caused a series of tsunamis that would take more than 200,000 lives and cause billions of dollars in damage. The tsunami devastated coastal communities in India, Indonesia, the Maldives, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Malaysia, Myanmar, Seychelles, Somalia, and Tanzania. The most badly affected country by far was Indonesia, where 80% of the tsunami related deaths occurred.²⁶ A total of 165,708 Indonesians died in the disaster, while 532,898 lost

²⁴ “Country Profile: Indonesia,” *EM-DAT*, <http://www.emdat.be/result-country-profile>.

²⁵ Tom McCawley, “Broad Reach for Java Quake; A World Bank Report Says the Damage is Much Greater than Initially Believed,” *The Christian Science Monitor*, June 27, 2006.

²⁶ Elisabeth Scheper, et. al, “Impact of the Tsunami Response on Local and National Capacities,” *Tsunami Evaluation Coalition* (2006): 67.

their homes or were otherwise affected.²⁷ Among the dead were 60 civil society leaders, 5,200 staff members of local authorities, and 3,000 civil servants.²⁸

Within Indonesia, the tsunami's impact was primarily concentrated in Aceh province, located on the northern end of the island of Sumatra, and the nearby island of Nias. Aceh is one of Indonesia's poorest provinces and Nias Island, a Christian community in a Muslim-majority country, has long been one of the country's least developed areas, which only served to magnify the impact of the tsunami. Indeed, the damage inflicted on the province by the tsunami was equivalent to approximately 97% of the province's annual GDP.²⁹ Furthermore, while Indonesians were struggling to recover from the tsunami, a second earthquake struck off Aceh's coast on March 28, 2005 and caused an additional 893 deaths on Nias.³⁰

In the face of such devastation, the international community responded with unprecedented generosity, and donors and aid organizations rushed to support the Indonesian relief effort. Ostensibly, such a large-scale disaster and well-funded response offered many opportunities for coordination, many opportunities to support and build on local relief and recovery capacity. To a great degree, however, the tsunami relief effort was dogged by failures of coordination.

Coordination among International Agencies

Though the Indian Ocean Tsunami struck prior to the implementation of the UN Cluster System, there were several coordination structures in place at the time. Indeed, the primary purpose of the IASC is to provide a forum for coordination. Unfortunately, the structure of the

²⁷ "Country Profile: Indonesia," *EM-DAT*, <http://www.emdat.be/result-country-profile>.

²⁸ Elisabeth Scheper, et. al, "Impact of the Tsunami Response on Local and National Capacities," *Tsunami Evaluation Coalition* (2006): 23.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 21-24.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 67

IASC largely barred it from succeeding in that aim. While private INGOs, such as the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement were welcome to participate in IASC meetings, they could only do so as observers. Committee membership, and thus the power to impact relief and policy decisions, was restricted to UN agencies. This structure fundamentally limited the appeal of UN coordination meetings (hosted by OCHA) and thus their ability to coordinate the response. Throughout the relief and recovery operations in Aceh and Nias, OCHA's coordination meetings were poorly attended and rarely productive. During the first three months of the disaster response (the relief phase), there were more than 250 NGOs operating in Indonesia, yet OCHA meetings would only have between ten and forty attendees, who were generally representatives of larger relief agencies. These meetings did little to encourage a cohesive, locally directed response. They became little more than "a platform for presenting projects planned or underway," which would be in no way altered by suggestions made during the meeting.³¹ As aid agencies became increasingly frustrated with these fruitless meetings, many began to send junior staffers with little power to make decisions as representatives, further reducing their effectiveness.³²

Beyond the IASC forum itself, there exist many structures within the UN disaster coordination system to improve the cohesiveness of disaster relief. In addition to OCHA's Humanitarian Information Centers (HIC), relief agencies also have the opportunity to work with the UN Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) to move people and goods, the UN Disaster Assessment Teams (UNDAC), and the UN Joint Logistics Center (UNJLC). Yet, little was done to inform NGOs working in Aceh of the tools at their disposal. Almost no effort was made by

³¹ Jon Bennett, "Coordination of International Humanitarian Assistance in Tsunami-Affected Countries," *Tsunami Evaluation Coalition* (2006): 48.

³² *Ibid*, 37.

OCHA to distribute information about these programs or information about the status of the relief effort as a whole to groups in the disaster zone.³³

It is therefore unsurprising, that there was a great deal of overlap and misallocation in the response to the tsunami. Such misallocation is perhaps best represented by the unequal distribution of relief agencies across the affected region. For example, whereas Banda Aceh, the provincial capital, and the nearby district of Aceh Besar were each served by more than 50 NGOs, other districts, such as Ach Jaya and Pidie, located further from the center of operations, but in equal need, had a much smaller NGO presence.³⁴ More than just preventing an equal distribution of services, however, this failure to coordinate at the highest levels also guaranteed that even if INGOs working in the tsunami affected region had sought to promote a more effective use of local capacity and greater coordination with local structures, it would have been difficult for them to do so.

Working with the Indonesian Government

When the tsunami struck its coast in December 2004, the Indonesian government already had its own agency responsible for organizing the response to such disasters, which are all too common in the country. This National Disaster Management Board, more commonly known as Bakornas, had branches in each of Indonesia's provinces, setting it up to be a valuable partner for international agencies in the tsunami response. Unfortunately, Bakornas' links to Aceh were particularly weak, owing in large part to the ongoing conflict between the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) and the government. Nor did Bakornas have a specific contingency plan should a disaster on the scale of the 2004 tsunami occur. This institutional weakness limited Bakornas'

³³ Jon Bennett, "Coordination of International Humanitarian Assistance in Tsunami-Affected Countries," *Tsunami Evaluation Coalition* (2006): 33-37.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 57.

ability to coordinate the tsunami response and to serve as a link between local communities and international agencies. As such, the board soon found itself marginalized in the relief effort, and in April of 2005, the Indonesian government created a new Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency (BRR) to handle the tsunami response.³⁵ Even under the new agency, however, the weak linkages between Aceh province and the central government persisted. In creating its reconstruction plan, the government made little effort to seek the suggestions of the affected population, and the initial plan was met with great criticism. As the head of the Aceh Islamic Students Association complained, “They didn’t involve the Aceh people. Only the leaders designed this blueprint.”³⁶

The Indonesian government’s poor ties with the Achenese were not the only factors that limited its ability to represent their needs to the international relief community. Relations between the government and international actors in Aceh were strained and filled with mistrust throughout the relief and recovery process. On the Indonesian side, some of that mistrust stemmed from lingering discontent over the 1999 UN intervention in East Timor.³⁷ Indonesian officials were also concerned about the impact that international involvement in Aceh might have on the nearly thirty-year conflict between the government and the GAM, a concern that led them to place limits on IO mobility and access in the region.³⁸ These tensions were exacerbated as the government’s reconstruction blueprint was delayed for several months, forcing IOs to pause their building plans.³⁹

³⁵ Elisabeth Scheper, et. all, “Impact of the Tsunami Response on Local and National Capacities,” *Tsunami Evaluation Coalition* (2006): 21-26.

³⁶ Dan Eaton, “Indonesia Tsunami Relief Effort Faces Tough Times,” *Reuters News*, April 18, 2005.

³⁷ Jon Bennett, “Coordination of International Humanitarian Assistance in Tsunami-Affected Countries,” *Tsunami Evaluation Coalition* (2006): 40.

³⁸ “Indonesia: Tsunami Impact,” *Economist Intelligence Unit*, January 10, 2005.

³⁹ “Political Squabbles Delay Indonesia Tsunami Rebuilding,” *OsterDowJones Commodity Wire*, May 15, 2005.

In March of 2005, UNICEF was actually forced to end its operations in Aceh. This only added to the disillusionment many relief agencies felt as a result of the ongoing tensions with Bakornas and discouraged many IOs from cooperating with the government. In the wake of the tsunami, 428 NGOs were registered as operating in Indonesia. By September, only 128 organizations had submitted the official activity reports that would have aided the government in its attempts to coordinate recovery efforts.⁴⁰ Thus marginalized by international relief agencies, Indonesia's disaster management structure actually became weaker. Whereas proper coordination and linkages with international organizations and agencies might have provided an opportunity to make the tsunami relief efforts more effective and to improve the Indonesian capacity to respond to such events, in this case, the reverse occurred.

International Organizations and Locals: The Difficulties of Coordination

These failures of communication between the Indonesian government and IOs were all the more damaging to the relief effort because there had been very little IO presence in Aceh prior to the tsunami. The ongoing conflict between GAM separatists and the Indonesian government had discouraged outside organizations from risking involvement in the province. With little experience in the region, most IOs did not fully understand the nature of the situation they were entering. Many mistakenly equated the tsunami relief effort in Aceh with previous responses to complex emergencies in developing nations.⁴¹ In reality, however, the December 26th tsunami was a very localized disaster in a relatively developed nation (Indonesia was ranked

⁴⁰ Jon Bennett, "Coordination of International Humanitarian Assistance in Tsunami-Affected Countries," *Tsunami Evaluation Coalition* (2006): 40.

⁴¹ Claude de Ville de Goyet and Lezlie C Moriniere, "The Role of Needs Assessment in the Tsunami Response," *Tsunami Evaluation Coalition* (2006): 57.

111th on the Human Development Index at the time of the disaster) that had significant local capacity to respond to such a disaster.⁴²

The difficulties resulting from IO inexperience in Aceh and Nias were compounded by a deep fear of corruption in the donor community. Indonesia has a long history of corruption, a fact that made many donors and organizations hesitant to partner with locals. Furthermore, western media's extensive focus on fears of corruption only served to strengthen these concerns. News networks were quick to publish reports, such as the claim of an Aceh Emergency Commission member that \$122.7 million had been lost to corruption during the response, that could quickly put a halt to aid funding.⁴³ At the UN level, officials were eager to prove that they had improved their anti-corruption measures after the heavy criticism the UN received because of extensive graft in its food-for-oil program in Iraq.⁴⁴ Such concerns made international groups hesitant to partner with local actors and, when such partnerships did arise, hesitant to give those actors significant autonomy. At an even more fundamental level, however, language barriers had a grievous impact on coordination, making it difficult to work with local organizations and spread information about projects. Few INGOs working in the area had a sufficient number of staff members fluent in the local language, Achenese (which is different from the Indonesian national language, Bahasa Indonesia).⁴⁵

These failures of understanding and coordination created a relief effort that systematically undervalued and underutilized the capacity of local nongovernmental and community organizations. Of all of the many assessments carried out by IOs during the relief phase of the tsunami response, none accurately evaluated the ability of Achenese organizations

⁴² Sakiko Fukada-Parr, "Human Development Report 2004," *United Nations Development Program* (2004).

⁴³ Lena Lee, "Graft Alleged in Indonesia Aid Projects," *Dow Jones International News*, July 1, 2005.

⁴⁴ Andrew Quinn, "Graft Fears Stalk Indonesia Tsunami Aid Efforts," *Reuters News*, January 11, 2005.

⁴⁵ Jon Bennett, "Coordination of International Humanitarian Assistance in Tsunami-Affected Countries," *Tsunami Evaluation Coalition* (2006): 52.

and structures to contribute to the response. Some reports, like Save the Children's initial assessment of the region, praised the efforts of local volunteers in the hours following the tsunami's impact. However, those reports went no further and made few suggestions to incorporate such volunteers into the response.⁴⁶

This is not to say that Achenese NGOs and community organizations were completely ignored in the tsunami response. Quite the opposite, many organizations stressed the importance of working with local "partners." Yet the term "partner" misrepresents the nature of the relationship between IOs and local actors. Local organizations acted as sub-contractors for IOs, subject to strict guidelines and reporting rules. They were not given the opportunity to use their knowledge to design programs or to prioritize one program over another. Rather, these Achenese organizations were perceived as simply providing services that IOs had already decided was necessary.⁴⁷ This type of relationship was so pervasive that, in its evaluation of its response, UNICEF specifically encouraged its personnel to use such "sub-contracting" relationships in future emergency responses.⁴⁸

Of course, by denying local groups autonomy to direct the tsunami response, IOs operating in Aceh denied themselves and the Achenese access to a valuable resource. As was clear in the case of the Indonesian organizations Holi'a'na and LPAM, locals are often able to achieve what foreign actors cannot. When the second earthquake devastated Nias in March of 2005, these two groups were able to bring aid to communities in Nias that international agencies could not access. Yet, since the tsunami relief effort had begun three months previously, these groups had received little assistance from outside organizations to strengthen their response

⁴⁶ Claude de Ville de Goyet and Lezlie C Moriniere, "The Role of Needs Assessment in the Tsunami Response," *Tsunami Evaluation Coalition* (2006): 29.

⁴⁷ Elisabeth Scheper, et. all, "Impact of the Tsunami Response on Local and National Capacities," *Tsunami Evaluation Coalition* (2006): 27.

⁴⁸ "The 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami Disaster Evaluation of UNICEF's Response," *UNICEF* (2006): 4.

capabilities and thus to better serve remote victims in Nias.⁴⁹ Even large, well-established Indonesian organizations were not immune to such abuse. Despite its relatively large capacity for relief operations and vastly superior local knowledge, the Indonesian Red Cross (PMI) found itself unable to control the actions of foreign Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, who collected donations and planned programs according to the priorities of their home country donors rather than PMI requests.⁵⁰

In truth, many local leaders and organizations found themselves overwhelmed by the challenges facing them in the wake of the tsunami. Several village leaders admitted that the decisions before them, such as planning recovery operations and settling land disputes, were more than they could handle on their own. When interviewed in the months following the disaster, these leaders actually requested greater involvement in their communities by international agencies. What these leaders sought was not simply more funding or more donor-planned projects, but rather training and advice to help them build the skills necessary to handle the challenges before them.⁵¹ When Catholic Relief Services (CRS) interviewed its beneficiaries and partners as its recovery effort came to a close, many of those partners made similar requests, asking that they be given skills trainings earlier so that they might be able to contribute more to the relief and recovery process.⁵²

IOs working in Aceh thus had a valuable opportunity, not only to use local knowledge to improve their own efforts, but also to strengthen the ability of their beneficiaries to face crises on their own. Yet rather than choose to build the capacity of their partners, these IOs often crippled

⁴⁹ Elisabeth Scheper, et. all, "Impact of the Tsunami Response on Local and National Capacities," *Tsunami Evaluation Coalition* (2006): 37.

⁵⁰ Jon Bennett, "Coordination of International Humanitarian Assistance in Tsunami-Affected Countries," *Tsunami Evaluation Coalition* (2006): 54.

⁵¹ Elisabeth Scheper, et. all, "Impact of the Tsunami Response on Local and National Capacities," *Tsunami Evaluation Coalition* (2006): 69.

⁵² Margie Ferris-Morris, "Independent One Year Post-Tsunami Impact Assessment of Catholic Relief Services Programs in Aceh, Indonesia," *Catholic Relief Services* (2006): 7.

their partners. Particularly in the early days of the relief effort, “poaching” local staff members, luring them away with the promise of better salaries, was a common practice.⁵³ Thus deprived not only of the opportunity to exercise their abilities, but also of their most capable members, many community organizations emerged from the tsunami recovery period weaker.

The focus of any disaster relief and recovery program ultimately lies with its beneficiaries. A response can only be effective if it reflects an advanced understanding of the needs and desires of the communities it is attempting to aid. Even coordination with national and local governments and community-based organizations is ultimately only a means of understanding these recipient priorities and concerns. Yet, one of the weakest areas of coordination in the tsunami response was communication between IOs and donors and the beneficiaries themselves. Agencies would often claim that they had incorporated communities into their relief programs, but in reality, that involvement was superficial at best. As the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition described, “beneficiaries were treated as passive recipients rather than active participants in the aid process.”⁵⁴ Rather than being asked what sort of aid they needed, families affected by the tsunami were given what aid agencies deemed best.

These problems were present from the very beginning of the relief period, as agencies began to carry out the assessments that would determine how they allocated aid. Many people were never asked what they needed. A claim-holder survey conducted by the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition, found that of 1,000 respondents, 57% had never been consulted about their needs at all. Nor had the Achenese population been given the opportunity to participate in the recovery process on a larger scale. When asked if there had been “community-level discussions with local government, Achenese NGOs, INGOs and others,” 62% of respondents replied that

⁵³ Elisabeth Scheper, et. all, “Impact of the Tsunami Response on Local and National Capacities,” *Tsunami Evaluation Coalition* (2006): 35.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 32.

they had neither participated in nor been informed of such discussions.⁵⁵ Furthermore, even when affected individuals were assessed to determine their level of need, they were not asked how they would like those needs to be addressed. For example, over 90% of the TEC survey's respondents indicated that they would have preferred cash subsidies over physical aid, which would give them the flexibility to rebuild their lives on their own terms.⁵⁶ Such subsidies, however, would have required a greater level of trust in the local population's ability to manage its recovery than existed among most agencies. Nor were these assessments and the stated preferences of beneficiaries used to any great extent to influence decision-making. More often, regardless of assessment results, agencies would implement projects that reflected their own preferences, perhaps even going so far as to get a community leader to sign off on a donor designed project so that the agency could claim that their program was "community-based."⁵⁷

As relief and recovery projects got underway, this trend of poor communication between agencies and beneficiaries continued. Several INGOs were criticized, as Catholic Relief Services was, for failing to keep communities informed as shelter building projects went forward and failing to explain delays as they occurred.⁵⁸ On a broader scale, there were no public information campaigns to educate affected individuals and communities about the resources available to them and the progress of projects that affected them. Even when OCHA finally hosted a public information workshop for relief agencies in August (eight months after the tsunami), none of the workshop's suggestions were implemented.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Elisabeth Scheper, et. all, "Impact of the Tsunami Response on Local and National Capacities," *Tsunami Evaluation Coalition* (2006): 97.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 29-30.

⁵⁷ Jon Bennett, "Coordination of International Humanitarian Assistance in Tsunami-Affected Countries," *Tsunami Evaluation Coalition* (2006): 48.

⁵⁸ Margie Ferris-Morris, "Independent One Year Post-Tsunami Impact Assessment of Catholic Relief Services Programs in Aceh, Indonesia," *Catholic Relief Services* (2006): 7.

⁵⁹ Jon Bennett, "Coordination of International Humanitarian Assistance in Tsunami-Affected Countries," *Tsunami Evaluation Coalition* (2006): 50.

Exceptions to the Rule: Good Practices of Coordination

Despite these problems, the humanitarian response to the Indian Ocean Tsunami in Aceh and Nias was not without positive examples of coordination. On the highest level, a local branch of the IASC was created specifically to serve the Aceh province. All international actors in the province were invited to attend the meetings of this unique, local IASC, regardless of whether or not they were traditionally included in IASC groupings. Of course, most INGOs were only able to participate in these meetings as observers, and local NGOs were not included.⁶⁰ Nonetheless, this new IASC format represented an important step towards inclusiveness in humanitarian relief.

Coordination between the Indonesian government and IOs also improved in the region as the response progressed. This was particularly true after the creation of the BRR in April 2005. The staff of this new agency was very skilled and received technical assistance from the UN, International Financial Institutions, and INGOs that helped them to better respond to the crisis. Under the leadership of the BRR, the Indonesian government was able to assume a stronger control of information systems and NGO registration and to finally complete its transitional recovery plan.⁶¹

There were also a select group of IOs who went to great lengths to coordinate their relief efforts with the expressed wishes of their beneficiaries. Particularly noteworthy was Christian Aid's program. As it did not have a history of working in Aceh, Christian Aid chose to work entirely through partner organizations. Though it found that local NGO partners, such as the Indonesian NGO LPAM in Nias, were not always as efficient as larger international agencies

⁶⁰ Jon Bennett, "Coordination of International Humanitarian Assistance in Tsunami-Affected Countries," *Tsunami Evaluation Coalition* (2006): 34.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 61.

that might have more experience with shelter construction, Christian Aid also found that its local partners had a unique capacity to engage affected communities in recovery work. One such Indonesian partner, OPPUK was able to organize local volunteers to clear affected land, creating a far more sustainable solution than the cash-for-work programs many IOs relied upon.⁶² Oxfam took another approach to improve the capacity of local organizations when, a few months after the tsunami, it created an Aceh NGO support network to aid local organizations.⁶³ Similarly, not all assessments carried out by INGOs were meaningless. MSF, one of the first groups in the area to acquire private helicopters, visited thirty villages before deciding where to focus their efforts and where to establish a direct presence.⁶⁴

Conclusions

Many of the organizations responding to the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami expressed the importance of ensuring that the relief effort reflected the needs and priorities of the affected communities. Despite these stated commitments, the Achenese were largely left out of the response to the disaster that destroyed their homes. Those international relief agencies that included local communities and organizations in their relief efforts did so only on the most superficial of levels. Rather than strengthen the structures that might allow the Achenese to help themselves recover and respond to future disasters, these agencies weakened those very structures. These failures of coordination and consultation began at the very top of the system. Within official structures such as the IASC, coordination between IOs was weak at best, and local NGOs and community based-organizations were left out of the system entirely.

⁶² Hugh Goyder, "Christian Aid Tsunami Evaluation: Synthesis Study," *Christian Aid* (2007): 11.

⁶³ Elisabeth Scheper, et. all, "Impact of the Tsunami Response on Local and National Capacities," *Tsunami Evaluation Coalition* (2006): 36.

⁶⁴ Claude de Ville de Goyet and Lezlie C Moriniere, "The Role of Needs Assessment in the Tsunami Response," *Tsunami Evaluation Coalition* (2006).

Many aid agencies attributed these failures to a lack of capacity, both in language skill and in personnel, as well as a lack of existing relationships with local organizations. However, multiple evaluations of the response to the tsunami have noted that coordination on that level simply wasn't a priority. In the end, agencies responding to the tsunami were most concerned with providing highly visible aid quickly, and local organizations, while ostensibly valued as partners, were perceived as slowing down that process.⁶⁵

Case #2: The Yogyakarta Earthquake

When the Ground Shook in Java

In the early hours of the morning on May 27, 2006, a 6.2 magnitude earthquake struck the Yogyakarta province, near the center of the Indonesian island of Java. The province was devastated. In addition to the 5,778 residents killed in the disaster, 348,693 homes were completely destroyed or severely damaged.⁶⁶ Fortunately for aid workers, though the provincial capital of Yogyakarta was greatly damaged, its roads were largely left intact. Only six miles to the south, however, there were villages in which 90% of homes were destroyed.⁶⁷ In Bantul, nearest to the earthquake's epicenter, the damage from the disaster was equivalent to 246% of the town's annual GDP.⁶⁸ Of course, in light of the significantly lower number of deaths, it is tempting to say that this earthquake was a much milder disaster than the Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004. Yet, the scope of this event was in some ways much larger. At least 1,173,000 people

⁶⁵ Claude de Ville de Goyet and Lezlie C Moriniere, "The Role of Needs Assessment in the Tsunami Response," *Tsunami Evaluation Coalition* (2006): 11.

⁶⁶ "Country Profile: Indonesia," *EM-DAT*, <http://www.emdat.be/result-country-profile>.; James Shepherd-Barron, "Situation Report: 21 June 2006," *Emergency Shelter Coordination Group* (2006).

⁶⁷ "Thousands Dead in Indonesia Earthquake," *NPR*, May 27, 2006.

⁶⁸ Bevaola Kusumasari, "Network Organization in Supporting Post-Disaster Management in Indonesia," *International Journal of Emergency Services* 1 (2012): 71.

were left homeless by the Yogyakarta earthquake, three times the number of Indonesians left homeless by the tsunami.⁶⁹

The May 27th earthquake ultimately inspired a massive international response. A total of 546 actors were involved in the relief effort, including UN agencies, commercial organizations, private donors, universities, military departments, as well as 246 Indonesian NGOs and 127 INGOs.⁷⁰ In spite of this large response, funding for the relief effort failed to meet the needs of the enormous population of IDPs. This was partially due to the fact that the damage to Yogyakarta province vastly exceeded what would normally result from an earthquake of the May 27th quake's magnitude. Unfortunately, the earthquake struck one of Indonesia's most densely populated areas. Weak homes of burnt bricks and loose mortar were built close together and collapsed into each other when the ground began to shake, magnifying the earthquake's damage.⁷¹ Furthermore, the relatively low number of deaths also reduced donor interest in the Yogyakarta relief effort. Together, these factors left aid groups struggling to provide much needed relief. At the end of July, relief agencies still lacked tarpaulins to provide even the most basic shelter for 310,245 homeless individuals.⁷²

Though underfunded, the response to the Yogyakarta earthquake was unusually quick. The event itself did not catch the humanitarian relief community entirely off guard, though they were unprepared for its magnitude. The May 27th quake was the third earthquake to strike Indonesia in eight months and came only two and half years after the massive destruction of the 2004 tsunami.⁷³ Furthermore, many agencies were already in the area preparing for the

⁶⁹ Tom McCawley, "Broad Reach for Java Quake; A World Bank Report Says the Damage is Much Greater than Initially Believed," *The Christian Science Monitor*, June 27, 2006.

⁷⁰ Pauline Wilson and Donal Reilly, "Joint Evaluation of Their Responses to the Yogyakarta Earthquake," *CARE, Catholic Relief Services, Save the Children, and World Vision Indonesia* (2007): 5.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 5.

⁷² James Shepherd-Barron, "Situation Report: 21 June 2006," *Emergency Shelter Coordination Group* (2006).

⁷³ "Thousands Dead in Indonesia Earthquake," *NPR*, May 27, 2006.

anticipated eruption of the Mount Merapi Volcano. The volcano is located a mere 15 miles to the north of Yogyakarta, so when the earthquake struck many organizations simply shifted the resources they had planned to use around Merapi to Yogyakarta. IOs were also able to use some of the connections with local groups that they had formed in the, albeit brief, time that they had been in the area.

Whether a result of the different scope of this disaster, the early arrival of relief workers, or the new cluster coordination system introduced by the UN, coordination during the earthquake response greatly surpassed that of the tsunami response. Of course, there were many failures of consultation, but there were also many positive examples of international actors working closely and respectfully with their local counterparts in Yogyakarta.

The UN Cluster System at Work: Coordination on an Inter-Agency Level

One of the most successful aspects of the response to the 2006 Yogyakarta earthquake was the implementation of the recently created UN Cluster System. In use for only the second time, the cluster system was set up and operational by June. Eight clusters were established covering areas such as Food and Nutrition, Shelter, and Logistics. The clusters played an important role by establishing uniform criteria for aid allocation and setting a definitive end to relief and recovery operations.⁷⁴ Weekly meetings of the agencies operating within a cluster also encouraged better mapping of the relief effort, clarifying which agencies were working in specific areas. It is worth noting that several INGOs also carried out their own mapping efforts parallel to the UN work. For example, Oxfam greatly improved its Geographic Information System (GIS), which displayed the population of various areas in the region, as well as the

⁷⁴ Jon Bennett, et. all, "Full Report of the Mid-Term Evaluation of the Indonesia PRRO 10069 'Assistance to Recovery and Nutritional Rehabilitation'," *World Food Program, Office of Evaluation* (2006): 51.

damage caused by the earthquake and eventually the coverage of aid distribution. Even these parallel programs, however, were not entirely separate from the broader relief community. Oxfam frequently shared its GIS data with other actors in the region and relied on these actors to add to and improve the accuracy of their data.⁷⁵

The cluster system as operated during the earthquake relief effort was also significantly more inclusive than previous attempts at coordination. Cluster membership expanded beyond traditional IASC agencies, as both local and international NGOs were strongly encouraged to participate in relevant cluster meetings. Furthermore, those agencies that participated in clusters were more engaged with coordination efforts than they might have been in the past. In the shelter cluster, twenty-six of the fifty-six cluster members provided specific data about their distribution of services, accounting for 90% of all shelter services provided in Yogyakarta.⁷⁶ This coordination also extended to the government as well, and many cluster meetings were jointly chaired by a representative of the Indonesian government and a member of the cluster's lead agency.⁷⁷ Additionally, to ensure that local organizations and the affected population were aware of coordination efforts made by the clusters, key documents, such as the shelter cluster's framework to guide shelter relief operations, were issued in Bahasa.⁷⁸

It is important not to overlook the flaws in this early implementation of the cluster system. For all of the increased participation by relief agencies, there were still many actors who did not engage fully or at all in coordination activities. Even lead agencies often found their attention divided, as most of them were also implementing relief programs as well. The World

⁷⁵ John Prideaux-Brune and Ivan Scott, "Real Time Evaluation of Oxfam GB's Response to the Java Earthquake of 27th May 2006," *Oxfam* (2006): 7-8.

⁷⁶ Jon Bennett, et. al, "Full Report of the Mid-Term Evaluation of the Indonesia PRRO 10069 'Assistance to Recovery and Nutritional Rehabilitation'," *World Food Program, Office of Evaluation* (2006): 51.

⁷⁷ Pauline Wilson and Donal Reilly, "Joint Evaluation of Their Responses to the Yogyakarta Earthquake," *CARE, Catholic Relief Services, Save the Children, and World Vision Indonesia* (2007): 5.

⁷⁸ James Shepherd-Barron, "Situation Report: 21 June 2006," *Emergency Shelter Coordination Group* (2006).

Food Program, in charge of the Logistics and Food and Nutrition clusters, experienced significant strain on its budget due to the added information management, technology, and administrative costs associated with running the clusters.⁷⁹ Nonetheless, it is difficult to deny that coordination among IOs was significantly stronger than it had been during the response to the 2004 tsunami in Aceh and Nias.

Working with the Government

During the course of the earthquake relief effort, there were many examples of effective coordination between the Indonesian government and agencies working in the region. In large part, this coordination represented the strength of the Indonesian government and Bakornas, its disaster management agency. Bakornas was very clear about the role that it expected IOs to play in the relief and recovery process. According to the government's mandate, the Indonesian government "would provide funds and the delivery mechanism for permanent housing," while other agencies, foreign and domestic, would "focus on pressing emergency and recovery needs."⁸⁰ This show of strength by the Indonesian government, and the willingness of IOs to respect that strength rather than circumvent it as they had in the past, helped to prevent overlap.

This is not to say that there was no conflict between IOs and the Indonesian government. Indeed, as one Indonesian official attested, there were often disagreements between agencies and the government over the geographic allocation of aid. IOs often preferred to focus their building efforts in areas that would help them to promote their image, which to conflict with government

⁷⁹ Jon Bennett, et. all, "Full Report of the Mid-Term Evaluation of the Indonesia PRRO 10069 'Assistance to Recovery and Nutritional Rehabilitation'," *World Food Program, Office of Evaluation* (2006): 51.

⁸⁰ Pauline Wilson and Donal Reilly, "Joint Evaluation of Their Responses to the Yogyakarta Earthquake," *CARE, Catholic Relief Services, Save the Children, and World Vision Indonesia* (2007): 5.

officials who were more concerned with reaching remote affected areas.⁸¹ Unfortunately, these conflicts were not always resolved positively. By late June, only 58 of the 65 affected sub-districts in the region had received aid, leaving out several communities in remote, hilly areas.⁸²

Some of the conflict between aid agencies and the Indonesian government must be attributed to the failings of the government itself. Though the Indonesian government's, and Bakornas', capacity to respond to natural disasters had improved since the 2004 tsunami, there were still significant gaps in its capabilities. This was particularly true with regards to disaster assessment. Even Indonesian NGOs were frustrated by the government's lack of ability in this area. As Iman Prasodjo, director of the Indonesian NGO Nurani Dunia said, "they might [have been] working very hard, but they [were] using the wrong tools."⁸³ In response, many IOs carried out their own assessments rather than work with inaccurate official assessments.⁸⁴ However, future coordination would have been better served by had these agencies assisted the government in its assessment process and improved its ability to perform them, rather than simply carrying out their own.

Empowering Local Communities and Organizations

There were many positive examples of cooperation between international and local actors working in Yogyakarta after the earthquake. At the very least, IOs placed greater emphasis on working with local partners on an equal footing than they had in the past. Several relief agencies stressed the need to "complement," rather than overshadow or circumvent, "the efforts of

⁸¹ Bevaola Kusumasari, "Network Organization in Supporting Post-Disaster Management in Indonesia," *International Journal of Emergency Services* 1 (2012): 77.

⁸² James Shepherd-Barron, "Situation Report: 21 June 2006," *Emergency Shelter Coordination Group* (2006).

⁸³ Tom McCawley, "Broad Reach for Java Quake; A World Bank Report Says the Damage is Much Greater than Initially Believed," *The Christian Science Monitor*, June 27, 2006.

⁸⁴ Bevaola Kusumasari, "Network Organization in Supporting Post-Disaster Management in Indonesia," *International Journal of Emergency Services* 1 (2012): 78.

affected people and the Indonesian government,” as well as the importance of “respect [for] the primary role of people affected by calamities to meet their basic needs through their own efforts.”⁸⁵ And these were not simply empty promises; they were backed up with concrete efforts by IOs to empower Indonesians in relief activities. In one notable case, Oxfam contracted an Indonesian organization, Satunama, to help with the monitoring and evaluation of Oxfam’s projects.⁸⁶ This represented not only an opportunity for Satunama to build its own organizational capacity, but also a chance for it to genuinely influence the direction of Oxfam’s work in the area.

As positive as such examples of working with local organizations may be, it must nonetheless be recognized that many of the problems that plagued cooperation between international and local organizations during the tsunami relief process in 2004 and 2005 persisted in 2006. Though many agencies put a greater emphasis on working with local organizations than in the past, these promises were still not fully realized. Even Oxfam, whose work with Satunama is to be lauded, admitted that it had not anticipated the level of “community and local agency capacity and their ability to cope.”⁸⁷ And while Oxfam’s ability to adjust its program to reflect local conditions is positive, that it was quite clearly not their standard procedure to first seek out and rely on local capacity indicates that such relationships remain a lower priority. Furthermore, when they did work with local partners, it was, as Oxfam members admitted, more often a subcontracting relationship than a true partnership.⁸⁸ This was certainly not unique to Oxfam. In the course of its relief work, the WFP worked with many local staff members and organizations.

⁸⁵ Pauline Wilson and Donal Reilly, “Joint Evaluation of Their Responses to the Yogyakarta Earthquake,” *CARE, Catholic Relief Services, Save the Children, and World Vision Indonesia* (2007): 8.

⁸⁶ John Prideaux-Brune and Ivan Scott, “Real Time Evaluation of Oxfam GB’s Response to the Java Earthquake of 27th May 2006,” *Oxfam* (2006): 6.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁸⁸ John Prideaux-Brune and Ivan Scott, “Real Time Evaluation of Oxfam GB’s Response to the Java Earthquake of 27th May 2006,” *Oxfam* (2006): 9.

The WFP did little to offer these partners the opportunity to build their capacity for disaster response. Rather, any trainings locals received focused strictly on WFP procedure, such as how to fill out required forms and the eligibility rules for WFP programs.⁸⁹

As Oxfam discovered after the Yogyakarta earthquake, not only Indonesian NGOs in the area, but also the province's communities themselves had a high level of capacity to respond to natural disasters. On the community level, that capacity was grounded in a long-standing tradition of 'gotong royong,' communal labor exchange between neighbors. To their credit, many of the aid agencies responding to the Yogyakarta earthquake recognized this local strength and adjusted their relief programs accordingly. Relief agencies relied extensively on community leaders to identify affected members of their communities and distribute aid to beneficiaries. This recognition of the ability of the affected population to manage its own recovery also manifested itself in programs that gave beneficiaries more control over the use of aid. One such program, CARE's temporary shelter project, chose not to build shelters for homeless families directly and instead provided recipients with vouchers to buy building materials from local vendors.⁹⁰ These programs not only supported local businesses, but also gave beneficiaries a greater sense of ownership and control.

Nonetheless, this recognition of community ability and consultation was far from universal. The response to the May 2006 earthquake still saw many relief projects that were designed and executed with little respect for the actual needs and wishes of beneficiaries. Even within a single organization, it was possible to find projects at both ends of the spectrum. World Vision, an INGO that relied heavily on local leaders to distribute relief materials, was also

⁸⁹ Jon Bennett, et. al, "Full Report of the Mid-Term Evaluation of the Indonesia PRRO 10069 'Assistance to Recovery and Nutritional Rehabilitation'," *World Food Program, Office of Evaluation* (2006): 69.

⁹⁰ Pauline Wilson and Donal Reilly, "Joint Evaluation of Their Responses to the Yogyakarta Earthquake," *CARE, Catholic Relief Services, Save the Children, and World Vision Indonesia* (2007): 12.

responsible for rebuilding schools in the province. In this case, however, beneficiaries were largely left out of the process. World Vision members selected school designs, contractors, and material with little community input or consultation.⁹¹

Though many of the efforts made by IOs to make their relief work more locally based focused on Indonesian NGOs and community leaders, other efforts, often carried out in tandem with higher level activities, aimed to learn what individual beneficiaries sought from the relief process. One such program, implemented by Save the Children, actually trained children to do a program evaluation. These children, who were often more forthright than the adults in the community, were encouraged to critically assess the aid they had received from Save the Children.⁹² In addition to offering Save the Children a deeper look at the effectiveness of its work, this program also improved the capacity of local communities to evaluate the aid they receive in any future emergencies. Similarly, CRS sought the opinions of its beneficiaries by establishing a formal complaints mechanism. Community leaders and recipients of CRS aid were encouraged to inform the agency of any concerns or complaints via SMS message. At least twenty complaints were received through this mechanism, which allowed CRS to deal with these problems quickly.⁹³

Unfortunately, the CRS complaints system was actually quite unique. Few other agencies operating in Yogyakarta had such official systems, and therefore had no mechanism through which aid beneficiaries could voice their complaints and concerns without fear of losing the assistance they were receiving.⁹⁴ Even more concerning, however, was the lack of attention given to women during the earthquake relief effort. Indeed, one of the most universal problems

⁹¹ Pauline Wilson and Donal Reilly, "Joint Evaluation of Their Responses to the Yogyakarta Earthquake," *CARE, Catholic Relief Services, Save the Children, and World Vision Indonesia* (2007): 67.

⁹² *Ibid*, ix.

⁹³ *Ibid*, 19.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 70.

noted in evaluations of the response was the failure to keep women involved in the relief process. Most relief agencies relied on formal community structures and male organizations to disseminate relief information and rarely gave women information or sought their opinions directly. Instead women were forced to “rely on their husbands and local leaders to find out what was going on.”⁹⁵

It is also worth observing that most of the positive examples of consultation with beneficiaries cited thus far, occurred at the beginning and planning stages of relief work. As relief projects progressed, the level of consultation between IOs and locals often declined. In fact, many members of recipient communities complained about the lack of follow-up by international aid agencies. Though the aid process was often very open at the start, with broad community meetings held to discuss aid, after a time aid agencies began to consult more exclusively with community and NGO leaders and leave the distribution process largely in their hands. Many beneficiaries felt that this withdrawal allowed aid to be distributed unfairly. To some extent, this complaint runs contrary to the idea that communities should have more control over their own relief process. Yet, individuals affected by the Yogyakarta earthquake rarely asked for complete control over the relief process. Far more often, those interviewed by evaluators requested that the aid process be carried out in a way that strengthened their communities’ ability to respond to crises.⁹⁶ That distinction sheds light on the true meaning of consultation with a disaster-affected population. The reality is that IOs cannot determine in advance how their coordination with local communities and NGOs will take shape, but must rather play the role that beneficiaries ask them to play.

⁹⁵ Pauline Wilson and Donal Reilly, “Joint Evaluation of Their Responses to the Yogyakarta Earthquake,” *CARE, Catholic Relief Services, Save the Children, and World Vision Indonesia* (2007): 18.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 13.

Conclusions

Without a doubt, the response to the Yogyakarta Earthquake shared many of the coordination difficulties that plagued the response to the Indian Ocean Tsunami in Aceh and Nias. International agencies arriving in the region often found themselves surprised by the capacity of local communities and organizations to participate in the relief effort. Furthermore, where these international actors made the effort to work with locals, that coordination was often superficial or short-lived. Nonetheless, the relief effort in Yogyakarta was characterized by significantly improved coordination between international agencies, and between international agencies and local actors. Caught by surprise by local capacity as many of these agencies were, there was a noticeable effort made by those agencies, and by Cluster System leaders to adjust to that capacity and to be more inclusive.

Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Research

The examination of the humanitarian response to the Indian Ocean Tsunami and the Yogyakarta Earthquake leaves little doubt that there was a greater effort by international agencies to coordinate with local organizations and affected families following the 2006 earthquake. In the latter response, not only did international relief agencies demonstrate better coordination amongst themselves, they also focused much more (and not just in words) on creating genuine partnerships with affected local actors. This is not to say that such partnerships were entirely absent during the tsunami response in Aceh and Nias. Nor is it to say that the Yogyakarta Earthquake relief effort represented the ideal level of local-international

coordination. If anything, the Yogyakarta response demonstrates the importance of continuing to pursue and deepen such partnerships.

That the level of coordination between local and international actors was higher during the humanitarian relief operation (Yogyakarta) that followed the implementation of the Cluster System seems to support the hypothesis that the UN Cluster System led to improved coordination between such local and international actors. That conclusion is further supported by the fact that the increased cooperation between local NGOs, communities, and IOs following the Yogyakarta Earthquake did not occur in isolation. The fact that this increased cooperation occurred in conjunction with increased participation in the UN coordination structure by IOs and that the Cluster System as operated by OCHA encouraged local sensitivity supports the conclusion that the Cluster System encouraged greater coordination with local actors.

Nonetheless, this conclusion is far from certain. While this study provides encouraging evidence about the ability of the Cluster System to foster stronger relationships between international and local relief actors, it should not be considered concrete proof of that ability. One of the greatest difficulties confronting any research on natural disasters is the infrequency of their occurrence. The limited number of cases available to researchers makes it difficult to select cases similar enough to isolate any single variable. This study is no exception. Despite the many strong similarities between the December 2004 events in Aceh and Nias and the May 2006 events in Yogyakarta, there are several other factors that could explain the variation in coordination levels between the two cases. Chief among these differences is the disparity in funding for the two relief efforts. The Indian Ocean Tsunami inspired an unprecedented level of donations from around the world. As such, many organizations found themselves struggling to find ways to spend all of the funds suddenly at their disposal. This abundance of funding greatly

reduced the need to coordinate with other actors during the relief effort. Moreover, the intensity of the media coverage of the disaster placed an unusually high level of pressure on relief agencies to produce rapid, measurable results to satisfy donors. There was thus a great incentive to prioritize speed over cooperation with local communities, which, while acknowledged by many agencies as important, would have slowed down the relief process.⁹⁷ Perhaps due to its significantly fewer fatalities, the Yogyakarta earthquake attracted neither the level of funding nor the level of media attention experienced during the aftermath of the Indian Ocean Tsunami.

Additionally, despite the fact that they are in the same country, there are several significant differences between the two affected areas studied here. Aceh is one of Indonesia's poorest provinces, and at the time of the tsunami, it was in the midst of a twenty-nine year conflict between separatists and the Indonesian government. There is little doubt that these conditions made humanitarian coordination more difficult. In contrast, Yogyakarta province, while not rich by international standards, is generally considered to be better off than many other regions in Indonesia. Also, as Yogyakarta is located on the main island of Java, where the capital is located, it has traditionally had a stronger relationship with the Indonesian government, an important factor in humanitarian coordination.⁹⁸

Finally, the fact that both disasters occurred in the same country, one of the very things that make the two cases suitable for comparison, also hinders the effectiveness of that comparison. There is little doubt that the response to the tsunami in Aceh had an effect on the way that agencies responded to the earthquake in Yogyakarta. Many agencies learned from the

⁹⁷ Tony Vaux, "Independent Evaluation of the DEC Tsunami Crisis Response," *Disaster Mitigation Institute* (2005).

⁹⁸ Pauline Wilson and Donal Reilly, "Joint Evaluation of Their Responses to the Yogyakarta Earthquake," *CARE, Catholic Relief Services, Save the Children, and World Vision Indonesia* (2007): 9-11.

mistakes that they had made in the earlier relief effort.⁹⁹ Indeed, very often the harshest criticism of the failures of international agencies to work with local actors during the tsunami response was found in the evaluations issued by the agencies themselves. The awareness of their previous failures likely made aid agencies more conscious about working with local partners in Yogyakarta. Furthermore, when the earthquake struck Yogyakarta in May 2006, many agencies had a larger presence in Indonesia than they had in December 2004 as a result of the continuing reconstruction from the tsunami.

Ultimately, this study offers valuable evidence in support of the idea that the UN Cluster System has led to greater cooperation between local and international actors during disaster relief work. The strength of this conclusion, however, is limited. In order to build a deeper understanding of the effect that the implementation of the UN Cluster System has had on the coordination of humanitarian relief, more such studies will be needed. The limited number of disasters available for study ensures that any future case studies will face similar difficulties in isolating the relevant factors. Therefore, only through many similar studies of disaster responses both before and after the creation of the Cluster System will it be possible to come to a firm conclusion about the impact of that Cluster System on coordination and the potential that it has to deepen local-international coordination in the future.

⁹⁹ John Prideaux-Brune and Ivan Scott, "Real Time Evaluation of Oxfam GB's Response to the Java Earthquake of 27th May 2006," *Oxfam* (2006): 11.