

Responding to Aceh's Tsunami: The first 40 days

"We do not want to be relocated to the barracks by the government...if we are forced to move to the barracks, so far from the place of our friends and relatives, the memories will die, just as the people have."

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ABREVIATIONS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AIPRD	Australia - Indonesia Partnership for Reconstruction and Development
BAKORNAS PBP	National Co-ordinating Board for Disaster Management
BAPPENAS	National Development Planning Agency
CGI	Consultative Group on Indonesia
CoHA	Cessation of Hostilities Agreement
CRS	Christian Relief Service
DEC	Disasters Emergency Committee
Depdagri	Department of the Interior
Depdiknas	National Education and Culture
Deplu	Department of Foreign Affairs
EU	European Union
ESPANAD	Employment Service for the People of Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam Province
FPI	Islamic Defences Front
GAM	Free Aceh Movement
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
ILO	International Labor Organisation
IMET	International Military Education Training
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSF	Medicines sans Frontieres
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non-governmental organisations
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PWI	Indonesia's Journalists Association
PCC-Aceh	People Crisis Centre - Aceh
SATKORLAK PBP	Provincial Coordinating Unit for Disaster Management
TNI	Indonesian Armed Forces
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UPC	Urban Poor Consortium
USA	United States of America
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank
WFP	World Food Program
WHO	World Health Organisation

INTRODUCTION

At 8:00 am on 26 December 2004, an earthquake measuring 9.0 on the Richter scale occurred in the Indian Ocean, just 150 km from Aceh, a province in the north-western corner of Indonesia already ravaged by war. The tremors were followed by a large tsunami that wreaked havoc in more than twelve countries in Southeast Asia, South Asia and East Africa.

The tsunami pounded Aceh and the island of Nias in North Sumatra, sending waves as far inland as 7 kilometres in places. In Aceh, the tsunami first hit the west coast, then the main town of Banda Aceh and finally the northeast coast. Houses, shops, and schools were devastated; cars and trucks were seen surfing the waves, and ships were churned in the waters, eventually finding moorings *in* or *on top of* buildings. Among the floating debris, and trapped in buildings and cars were some of the almost 250,000 members of Aceh's population now counted as dead or missing. In some places, the impact of the tsunami was so great that the coastline of Aceh has been redrawn, the sea engulfing parts of land where houses once stood. In other areas, land has appeared where before there was only sea.

In a matter of minutes, towns and villages in the affected areas were wiped from the map. Local economies and livelihoods were decimated, local fishing and farming capacities lost. Soon after the tsunami ceased its destruction, the fight against disease began. A shortage of clean drinking water, medical assistance, medicines, and lack of sanitation created a public health emergency. Tens of thousands of dead bodies littered the streets; thousands more remained trapped in the wreckage of some of Aceh's towns and villages. In the days and weeks following the tsunami, as assistance began to reach the most-affected areas, initially from elsewhere in Indonesia, and later from around the world, the scale of death and devastation shocked even the most experienced of relief and rescue workers.

When the waters finally receded and residents were relieved from the immediate life or death struggle, they surveyed a landscape where a force of nature as powerful as any imaginable had swept through their towns and villages. In many areas, the land where houses, government buildings, hospitals and schools, prisons and businesses once stood was completely flat – in some cases not even the floor tiles remained.

The local economy, administration, and infrastructure also sustained immeasurable damage. The provincial government ground to a halt as civilian government, military and police offices, the judicial system, and prisons were destroyed or damaged. The documents of many government departments including the police investigations unit, were destroyed, wiping out all traces of the thousands of cases brought against civilians during martial law, many of whom were guilty of no more than voicing opposition to the government and leading protests. Voting lists, land title deeds and other personal records were also lost in the disaster.

The effect of the tsunami upon Aceh can only be understood in the context of the pre-existing situation of strife and poverty. This report provides that context as it describes the impact that the tsunami had upon the social, political, physical and economic infrastructure of Aceh. It also examines the reaction of the international community and the effects of a foreign aid presence upon the province. Finally, it offers some recommendations for the future which are aimed at ensuring the rehabilitation and reconstruction phases in Aceh take account of the background of the conflict, are responsive to local needs, and are not driven by any alternative agenda.

CONFLICT IN ACEH

In order to fully understand the effect of the tsunami upon Aceh and its people, and also the limitations upon the relief efforts which followed, it is necessary to be aware of the political and economic reality of Aceh prior to the disaster.¹ The Indonesian government's somewhat delayed response to this overwhelming tragedy can only be fully comprehended within the

context of the violent and bloody struggle for independence that has waxed and waned in this remote corner of the giant archipelago for almost 30 years.

Aceh's recent history is one of violent unrest, driven by poverty and the bitter resentment of many local people at the perceived 'wrongs' perpetrated against them by the Indonesian authorities. In the early 1970s, foreign exploitation of Aceh's mineral wealth began in earnest with the discovery of natural gas in North Aceh. The modern industrial complex introduced by the gas industry was something that the majority of Acehnese were unable or unwilling to engage with. As late as the mid 1970s, there was not even a technical high school in the district, so most of the workers employed by the American oil giant Mobil Oil (later to become ExxonMobil) were imported mainly from Java and North Sumatra. The company invested billions of dollars in developing the production capacity and building the infrastructure for the 5,000 workers that it planned to employ.

As production of liquid natural gas (LNG) got underway in 1977, a development gap emerged in which the 'incomers' benefited more than the indigenous people who remained relatively untouched by this development. In reality, the LNG industry brought little benefit to the local economy or people; most of those employed were not Acehnese and little profit stayed in Aceh. The local people have remained impoverished; in October 2004, local government statistics showed 53% of families in Aceh were living in poverty; an increase over previous years.

Partly in reaction to the perceived economic exploitation of Aceh's natural resources, in 1976 Hasan di Tiro with a small group of fellow dissenters, established the Free Aceh Movement (GAM). On 4 December 1976, di Tiro unilaterally declared Aceh's independence from its 'colonial master' (Indonesia). The small uprising was quickly quelled by the Indonesian military and di Tiro left for Sweden. For several years it looked as if GAM had quite literally been wiped out. But in the 1980s, GAM members returned from Libya where they had undergone intensive military training, the separatists had strengthened themselves in both quantity and quality – a guerrilla war ensued.

The violent conflict

Aceh is the scene of the most prolonged and violent of Indonesia's internal conflicts. The two warring parties in question are the security forces of the Republic of Indonesia and the GAM. Since the late 1990s, opposition to rule by Indonesia's central government in Jakarta has been increasing. What began as discontent at perceived exploitation of Aceh's natural resources has been overtaken by local outrage at the widespread abuses of human rights during successive military operations in the province. During the decades of conflict, more than 15,000 people have been killed, and thousands more disappeared.

Since the year 2000 when a shaky peace process was begun by former President Abdurrahman Wahid, two peace agreements have been signed - both were short-lived. The most recent was the internationally brokered Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA) signed in December 2002. The CoHA had a troubled existence; there was no common understanding from either GAM or the Indonesian government of the document which both had signed, and in the field, violations including deaths, disappearances, torture and damage to infrastructure were common. Finally in April 2003, an ultimatum was issued by the central government: 'Renounce the push for independence or there will be no further negotiations.' GAM refused, the only solution for them was full independence. As a result, on 18 May 2003, the Indonesian government pronounced the peace process ended and arrested 5 members of the GAM negotiating team.

On 19 May 2003, in a concerted bid to crush the armed rebellion, the central government in Jakarta placed Aceh under martial law, closing the province to foreigners and imposing restrictions on the content of domestic media, thereby severely curtailing the flow of

information to the outside world. Although martial law was downgraded to a state of civil emergency one year later in May 2004, the door to the province remained largely closed to foreigners. Aceh remains under a civil emergency status – to be reviewed in May 2005. This state of emergency is one of the major factors in the tragically delayed response by the Indonesian government to the events of 26 December 2004: elements within the government and military simply did not want a foreign presence in the province. Eventually, faced with such an unprecedented humanitarian disaster, they were left with no choice but to accept the foreign assistance being offered. The door to Aceh was finally prised open.

In order to facilitate a more efficient relief operation after the tsunami, GAM announced a unilateral ceasefire. A press statement declared:

“The field commanders of the Aceh National Armed Forces have been instructed, while increasing their alertness and helping the best they can all the processes of aiding, evacuating and rehabilitating the victims of the earthquake and subsequent tsunami floods, to also restrain their troops from engaging the enemy in armed contact in order to avoid causing the people to feel trapped and panic.” (*GAM, 26 December, 2004*)

On 29 December 2004, the commander-in-chief of the Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI) General Endriartono Sutarto followed GAM’s lead with an offer of a cessation of hostilities from the military. No formal cease-fire agreement was reached, but both parties acknowledged the fact that armed clashes would hinder the humanitarian effort and should therefore cease.

IMPACT OF THE TSUNAMI – EARLY ACCOUNTS

In the first days after the tsunami, as the scale of the disaster was unfolding in Sri Lanka, Thailand, India and elsewhere, news of the situation in Aceh was extremely limited. In Jakarta, heated discussions were taking place between hard-line elements of the TNI who wanted Aceh to remain closed and were arguing that the Indonesians themselves could deal with the disaster, and those in government who quickly realised that international logistic and other assistance was not only inevitable, but essential.

On 27 December 2004, Indonesian president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) declared the situation in Aceh a national disaster, and appointed the National Co-ordinating Board for Disaster Management (BAKORNAS PBP) under the direction of Vice President Jusuf Kalla, to deal with the emergency relief effort. Kalla flew over the west coast city of Meulaboh on 28 December 2004 and reported that 80 percent of the city had been destroyed (*Tempointeraktif, 28 December, 2004*). These and other aerial surveys, along with eyewitness accounts of waves that were 30 meters high, dashed early hopes that many had survived. The emergency relief effort to the west was made more difficult by the fact that the tsunami rendered the 300 km road, which passes through Banda Aceh, Lhok Nga, west to Teunom, Calang and Meulaboh, impassable for cars and trucks. The areas around the west coast city of Meulaboh were completely cut-off, help could only reach survivors by helicopter or ship.

Twelve days after the tsunami, the death toll across 11 tsunami affected countries, Sri Lanka, India, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Myanmar, Maldives, Bangladesh, Somalia, Tanzania and Kenya had reached more than 150,000, with 98,489 of these in Aceh.² Referring to the region, the Secretary General of the United Nations (UN), Kofi Annan, said that this was “the largest natural disaster the UN has had to respond to on behalf of the world community in the sixty years of its existence.”³

By 4 February 2005, 40 days after the tsunami, 112,872 Acehnese had been officially declared dead; most buried in mass graves. An estimated 127,749 remained missing (BAKORNAS PBP, 5 February 2005). At the time this article was written in early March, the

respective figures had been adjusted to 125,996 dead and 94,105 missing. The exact number of lives lost remains uncertain and will likely never be known, especially as many did not register missing family members:

“Why should I report my parents, brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, cousins, nephews, nieces and all almost 300 members of my family missing? They are not missing – they are dead.” (*Interview with resident of Lamjabat Banda Aceh, 3 January, 2005*)

What is clear however, is that entire communities were decimated; in some places, little of the people or the infrastructure remains. In the worst areas, the only testament to the lost communities is in the memories of survivors. For some, not even a photograph remains of the family they have lost.

Although no systematic survey has been conducted, early indications are that more women and children died than men. The earthquake and tsunami struck on a Sunday morning when many women were at home with their children while the men had gone to the market or on other errands, giving them more chance to escape the waves that swept inland. It is also the case that many more men than women can swim, and that the women, many taking care of children and others, were probably less able to climb trees and scabble onto buildings. Lists compiled by local government workers and NGOs contained the names of thousands more women than men. And in the camps, women were noticeable only by their absence. Some were too traumatised to live in such rough conditions and stayed with friends or relatives whose houses remained intact, but many more had been crushed or drowned as the earthquake and then the tsunami ended their lives.

A DEVASTATED PROVINCE

With telecommunications down, and the province still closed, it was several days before news of the scale of the disaster in Aceh was known. On the first day, national and international media reported 500 dead, but Kalla was already estimating 5-10 thousand victims (*Tempo Interaktif, 26 and 27 December 2004*). It was only when the media and relief agencies entered Aceh that the true horror of the devastation was revealed. Apart from the loss of tens of thousands of lives, infrastructure in the affected areas was almost totally wiped out. In the main town of Banda Aceh, and along the west and east coast and the islands, hundreds of towns and villages had been swept away or partially damaged.

Physical Infrastructure

The impact of the tsunami was presented by the Department of the Interior (Depdagri) to a shocked Indonesian Cabinet: the districts worst affected by the tsunami were Aceh Jaya, where damage to buildings was 85%, Aceh Besar 80%, the capital city of Banda Aceh 75%, Simeulu island 50%, Sabang island 45% and West Aceh 60%. See map. An estimate of preliminary damage and loss by the National Development Planning Agency (BAPPENAS PBP) for the province of Aceh and North Sumatra was Rp 42.7 trillion or US\$ 4.5 billion. This included more than 250,000 houses, 8 ports and 4 fuel depots; 85 percent of water supplies and 92% of the sanitation system in the worst affected areas (*BAPPENAS, 19 January 2005 and data from State Ministry of People's Housing*). As many as 2,704 mosques, 8 churches, and 2 temples were also damaged. In addition, 423 km of primary road, and 2,191km of secondary roads in the province were closed (*BAKORNAS PBP, 7 January 2005*).

In the west coast city of Meulaboh, 80% of electricity cables fell, leaving the area in almost total darkness. Even in the Central Aceh town of Takengon, which was unaffected by the tsunami, the earthquake caused 100 electricity poles to topple, affecting thousands of homes and businesses. In Banda Aceh, electricity supplies were disrupted but due to the decrease

in demand because so many buildings had been destroyed, those who required electricity received at least a disrupted supply very quickly.

Government

The events of 26 December 2004 also left Aceh with no effective functioning local government. Thirteen of Aceh's 21 districts were affected by the tsunami, 6 of them severely. Aceh has 235 sub districts and a total of 5,967 villages. Of these, 52 sub districts were unable to function, and 921 villages were badly affected (*Department of the Interior - Depdagri, 26 January 2005*). The Aceh provincial government and many local level administrations suffered substantial loss of personnel, expertise, and infrastructure. According to Depdagri, 1,083 of Aceh's civil servants were killed, and a further 3,510 are missing (26 January 2005). Of the 20 prisons in Aceh, four were damaged or completely destroyed; many prisoners and staff were killed as the buildings collapsed. All that remains of Lhok'nga prison in Aceh Besar are the green floor tiles. Trapped in the cells, 93 of the 100 women being held there died; 248 of 278 prisoners in Keudah prison in Banda Aceh perished, and 36 of the 56 in Calang prison in West Aceh were also victims of the tsunami (*Department of Law and Human Rights, Banda Aceh, 29 January, 2005*).

Health & Education

In the worst tsunami-affected areas, health services were severely disrupted as hospitals and clinics were washed away, collapsed or were so badly damaged that they became inoperable. Three of Aceh's 32 hospitals were totally destroyed, another 4 badly damaged. Many sub-district health clinics (puskesmas) were also lost: 37 were destroyed, 40 damaged, and 15 small local clinics were also rendered useless. The local Department of Health reported 337 health workers confirmed dead, and another 441 missing.

Damage to the education sector was also substantial; 387 schools were destroyed, and 954 were damaged (*National Education and Culture Department – Depdiknas, 28 January 2005*). On 20 January, the head of the Department of Education in Aceh reported that 1,148 [teachers] had been confirmed dead and around 1,000 others were missing. The department conceded that this number could rise as access to the devastated areas improved and more information became available. The Department of Religion also reported that 209 of its religious schools were damaged, and 155 traditional Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) were damaged

For a small population of only 4 million people, Aceh has a surprisingly high number of universities; student numbers vary from only a few hundred to several thousands. The two biggest universities in Aceh in terms of student numbers and academic reputation are the State Islamic Institute (IAIN) and Syiah Kuala University (UNSYIAH), both located in Banda Aceh. IAIN sustained the most damage in the tsunami, affecting the education of thousands of university students. The Directorate General of Higher Education reported that 23 universities in Aceh have been destroyed and as many as 200 university lecturers swept away by the tsunami (*Sinar Indonesia Baru, 25 February 2005*).

Media & Information

Apart from power outages causing a media blackout, Aceh's only daily newspaper Serambi Indonesia was also a victim of the tsunami as were other newspapers with offices in the province, and numerous radio stations. Serambi Indonesia was unable to cover the biggest story in its history. For five days, the newspaper was not seen in the villages and towns in Aceh. Located only 500 meters from the coast, Serambi's office and printing presses were destroyed by the events, and almost half of its staff are dead or missing:

"We have lost 52 of our staff, 11 of them are our senior journalists. Our office is completely wiped out, and the printing machine was also swept away, we could not print the paper from 27 till 31 December 2004. We started to print again on 1 January 2005, and distributed free of charge until 8 January 2005 with only 8 pages. Our new office is

small, but anyway, we have to continue this work.” (*Interview, Banda Aceh, Nurdin Hasan, 10 January 2005*)

Banda Aceh also lost 16 radio stations; while in Meulaboh, all four local radio stations were either completely damaged or partially destroyed. The Aceh branch of the Indonesian Journalists Association (Persatuan Wartawan Indonesia - PWI) reported that 23 journalists were killed or are missing.

Economy

Economic activity in Aceh has largely developed around traditional farming, forestry and fishing, as well as local crafts such as embroidery and weaving. Aceh’s workforce numbers 2.5 million; of these, more than 1 million work in the agriculture sector.⁴ While in the coastal villages, most people are involved in the fishing industry. The local branch of the Maritime and Fishery Ministry reported that more than 14,000 fishermen were killed in the disaster, while between 6,000 to 8,000 fishing boats were either destroyed or lost. Meanwhile in farming sector, the devastation occurred in 9 districts, causing 51,446 hectares of land used for rice, beans, chilli, and other food crops to be rendered useless. In addition, a further 56,500 – 102,461 hectares of plantation land for rubber, palm oil, cloves, cocoa, and coffee was affected. The land has been heavily contaminated by mud and salt, and was covered in debris, bringing farming in many areas to a complete halt. Livestock were affected: 141,011 cows and buffalo, 89,233 goats and lambs, and 1,624,431 chicken and ducks were lost (*Indonesian Agency for Agricultural Research and Development, 22 February 2005*).

RESPONDING TO THE TSUNAMI

Early Relief Efforts

The strategy for the relief effort in the first few days was quite simple: attend to the living, leave the tens of thousands already dead until later. Lack of human resources demanded that to reach survivors, rescue workers would simply step over or push aside the bodies that littered the streets, and were piled up in doorways of partly ruined buildings. Many in Aceh are grateful to the military and police who performed this gruesome task: “If those guys hadn’t been here in the first few days, many more people would be dead” (*Interview with Becak driver, Lhok’nga, 9 January, 2005*). It wasn’t until 28 December 2004, when military and political hardliners submitted to demands to allow foreign humanitarian and relief assistance into Aceh that the government of Indonesia made an official request to the United Nations and others assist in the province.

Thousands of relief workers poured into Aceh to help: multilateral and bilateral agencies, local and international NGOs, emergency organizations, universities, trade unions, and individual local, national and international volunteers. Indonesia’s Department of Foreign Affairs (Deplu) expressed its gratitude to the international community, and acknowledged that:

“One of the most difficult challenges at this stage is to transport and distribute relief materials to isolated areas in which communications systems and other infrastructure is no longer operational. We further appreciate offers by friendly countries to mobilise more air transport to reach out to isolated areas” (*Deplu press release, 30 December, 2004*).

The close to obsolete state of much of the Indonesian military’s air and sea capabilities meant that substantial assistance reached those stranded in the more remote areas only with the arrival of foreign militaries from Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, America, and other countries. Militaries from more than 23 foreign countries brought heavy lifting equipment and large transport capabilities that were so vital to the relief effort. Repairs to roads and bridges were high on the priority list.

As international help arrived, the TNI, together with teams of volunteers, hastened efforts to complete the task of burying the dead in order to prevent the spread of diseases such as typhoid and cholera. Most were buried – unidentified – in lime-coated mass graves scattered throughout the affected areas in Aceh. In Banda Aceh, the sight of teams of military, police and volunteers in masks, rubber gloves and rubber boots collecting bloated and rotting corpses from the streets, and pulling them from Banda Aceh's rivers and wreckage of the buildings was common for more than a month after the disaster.

By week three, teams collecting bodies from the debris no longer even attempted to identify the victims:

“We can still tell if the body is a man or woman, but facial identification is impossible because of the rapid decay. In most cases there is no hope of identifying the body, since most are naked and so have no identity card. Our teams just wrap the bodies in plastic and leave them at the side of the road. Later, a truck will collect them to be taken to one of the many mass graves.” (*Interview with volunteer team coordinator, Banda Aceh, 17 January, 2005*)

Throughout January, an average of 1,500 bodies were recovered each day from the wreckage of Banda Aceh's buildings, or pulled from the city's rivers. On day 40 after the tsunami (4 February): 721 bodies were buried. By early March, the number of bodies being collected daily had decreased to less than 200. There was a growing consensus that most of the more than 100,000 who remained missing would never be found. Many living in Aceh, afraid of another quake, suffering from trauma and afraid of the spread of disease, began to leave the province by any available means, leaving the military and (largely non-Acehnese) volunteers to do the majority of the early cleanup operation.

With every passing day, as infrastructure improved, the scale of the disaster in the more remote areas became clearer. Thousands more were missing, swept away by the giant waves or trapped in the rubble of the ruined buildings; family members wandered the streets searching in the official camps, and the informal settlements that had sprung up in the towns and villages, desperately looking for any evidence those missing might still be alive. It was very likely however, that many of these people had already been buried. The sight of trucks piled high with bodies heading to the mass graves and the thought that relatives and friends might be one of those wrapped in black plastic, haunted many.

Local coordination and support centres (poskos) quickly sprung up all over Aceh to deal with the logistics of distributing aid to such a large number of people. These centres not only provided food, water and medical assistance, but many operated an informal tracing system; connecting survivors, and giving information about the dead already identified and those still missing. These poskos were run by local non-governmental organisations (NGOs), students groups, community based organizations, and even the TNI and police. But there was very little any of them could do to help those searching, except to offer a mechanism that gave people some hope – for a short time at least.

As the weeks passed, attention turned away from searching for the missing as people began to think about the future; many communities returned to the area of their original village. Forty days after the earthquake and tsunami, official figures showed that 412,438 people were displaced, scattered in 66 locations (*Department of Social Affairs - Depsos, 5 February, 2005*). But in fact, this data included only those in recognised camps, and did not include the thousands displaced in the communities. Many who lost their homes preferred not to live in the official camps where conditions were initially very poor, finding shelter instead in public buildings such as schools and government offices; mosques; under tarpaulin shelters or in makeshift camps – sometimes with no tents, while others lived with host families in communities unaffected by the tsunami. Certainly, in the first two weeks or more, the living

conditions for many were miserable. Fear and trauma continued to plague many as smaller earthquakes were almost a daily occurrence; buildings shook and electricity supplies were cut.

Local women's groups became active in trying to address the special needs of women survivors by gathering data on numbers of pregnant women and those who had newly given birth. The Bureau of Women Empowerment Bureau of the provincial government originally stated it had no special plans to address the needs of women. A member of the Bureau explained the reason why they adopted that position: "Men and women suffered equally in the earthquake and tsunami, we don't need to address women in a special way" (Interview, Banda Aceh, 7 January, 2005). But later, under the 'engaged' eye of the UN and other international agencies via a sectoral working group on gender, the Bureau began working to ensure that gender issues were also included in the government-led blueprint on the recovery and reconstruction of Aceh.

The logistics of response

Mechanisms for the national response were established and operationalised within the framework of the ongoing civil emergency. The relief effort was simply integrated into the existing military operation which in theory consisted of several programmes: restoring security, economics, humanitarian initiatives, law enforcement, and the empowerment of local government. The relief operation simply became part of the humanitarian component of the civil emergency.

The National Co-ordinating Board for Disaster Management (BAKORNAS PBP), directed by the Vice President, was given the task of co-ordinating the emergency relief effort, while the rehabilitation and reconstruction effort was assigned to the National Development Planning Agency (BAPPENAS). Restoration of economic activity in Aceh and North Sumatra was mandated to the Coordinating Ministry for the Economy.

Responsibility for the administration of the relief effort in Aceh lies with the provincial extension of BAKORNAS PBP, the Provincial Coordinating Unit for Disaster Management (SATKORLAK PBP). It is unusual in Indonesia for the central government to assign a Minister to be involved in disasters in the provinces, but due to the scale of the disaster in Aceh, the Coordinating Minister for Social Welfare was assigned to sit in the three person committee together with a senior army figure and the temporary governor of the province Azwar Abubakar who was promoted as temporary replacement for the troubled former governor, Abdullah Puteh, who was suspended in July 2004 after coming under investigation for corruption and misuse of provincial funds. Puteh is accused of corruption of Rp 10.8 billion (US\$1.2 million) of local government money. In early March, prosecutors asked the court to sentence Puteh to eight years imprisonment.

The military plays a key role

The military in Indonesia has, until very recently, enjoyed an influential role in the social, economic and political affairs of the country. It is logical therefore, that they are also involved in the disaster management body SATKORLAK PBP.⁵ The military's territorial command structure, running almost parallel to the civilian administration, is best placed (in theory at least) to mobilise quickly and efficiently in times of disaster. Moreover, in terms of manpower, it has more capacity than any other organisation in the country to play a substantial role in reconstruction.

During martial law, additional military and police were deployed to the province to 'crush' GAM, bringing the total number of TNI in the province to almost 50,000. After the tsunami, the mission for the majority of these troops already in Aceh changed from one of destruction, to one of search and rescue. The military themselves suffered substantial loss of life and

infrastructure, an estimated 552 troops were killed, and 470 weapons were lost (*Serambi Indonesia, 10 January 2005*).

Along the main road between Medan in North Sumatra and Banda Aceh, the military and police posts where only a few days earlier, arrests, intimidation, harassment and extortion was still common, lay largely empty after the tsunami; the military personnel had been redeployed to the disaster areas. The TNI said it had deployed 15,000 of those troops already in Aceh, to the disaster area. Immediate tasks were rescue, sheltering and feeding those who survived, and clearing rubble to ensure supply lines were open for relief efforts. Teams of volunteers came from all over Indonesian to participate in this effort. And on 14 January 2005, the TNI sent another 12,000 military personnel to Aceh to be deployed to hasten the evacuation of bodies and to clear the debris. (*Indonesia Defence Department news, 14 January 2005*). Additional police were also committed to the effort.

Distributing aid

The military institution has its own structure for handling the disaster, including aid distribution procedures. Foreign military liaison officers arriving in Aceh were briefed on the operational mechanisms for foreign military aid. It was made clear that responsibility for aid distribution rests with the TNI's humanitarian operation task force situated in Banda Aceh air port under the command of Major General TNI, Bambang Darmono (*TNI briefing at Banda Aceh airport, 11 January, 2005*). The task force has five division teams: information, internally displaced persons (IDPs), logistics, body evacuation, and a health care. As a point of interest, Darmono was also commander of martial law and the civil emergency in Aceh.

Beyond the military task force, distribution of aid at the district and sub district level is the responsibility of a local extension of the provincial SATKORLAK PBP. This local body – SATLAK PBP – has significant military presence within its structure. In fact, this agency's activities are facilitated by the three military commands in Aceh.

There is no doubt that in some cases, the distribution of hundreds of thousands of tons of aid was made more difficult by the presence of the military bureaucracy in the distribution mechanism. An Australian military officer commented:

“In the beginning, getting goods into Banda Aceh was not a problem, but as time passed and the Indonesia military tightened its bureaucracy, it became – quite frankly – a nightmare. We will try to stop flying goods to Banda Aceh, perhaps Sabang airport will be less problematic. I'm not saying the military are stealing the goods, but they seem to like to store everything in the warehouse. I'm frustrated that distribution is slow; there is no need for that. People out there [in Aceh] are desperate.” (*Interview, Medan, 25 January, 2005*)

A staff at SATKORLAK PBP at Banda Aceh airport confirmed:

“Relief supplies are stored in the local warehouses. SATLAK PBP will then distribute to the camps or the communities. If camp coordinators want to request logistics, they must apply to this local level administration, often run by the military.” (*Interview, Banda Aceh, 2 March 2005*)

The burdensome bureaucracy to obtain food, medicines, tents and other relief items instituted by the TNI is justified by the military hierarchy in the context of the ongoing conflict. The military is wary that some of the relief might end up in the hands of GAM who it has accused of establishing camps in order to obtain logistics intended for IDPs.

The legacy of the conflict in which the military enjoys impunity in its perpetration of abuses, corruption and other violations of political, social and economic rights, means many people

in Aceh are reluctant to approach the military run distribution centres to ask for help. This is a province where a psyche of fear is all pervasive, there are very few who have not experienced the death, torture, disappearance, rape or arrest of a family member, friend or work colleague:

“I heard there is a lot of aid at the airport, so I went there to ask whether I could get something for the IDPs in my village. But when I got there, I was ‘interrogated’ about many things: ‘Who are those IDPs?’ and many other questions. Finally, they did not want to give the aid because they said that my village is a stronghold area of GAM, so the people are not really displaced, but just pretending so they can have some food for GAM. They also suspected that some of the IDPs were in fact GAM.” (*Interview, Cot Ke’ung, Aceh Besar, 11 January 2005*)

Opportunism and profit

For many years, it has been a ‘common secret’ in Aceh, that some elements of the military and police have been able to pursue profit while on a tour of duty in the province. They do this by their involvement in illegal logging, the drugs economy, protection rackets for plantations, oil, gas and other companies. The security forces have been able to build a lucrative business climate for themselves in the province, by monopolising local production, extraction, transport and processing of some natural resources; controlling prices; appropriating land for themselves and on behalf of other parties; and many other commercial activities. In fact, it is virtually impossible to do business in Aceh without dealing with the military.

At the military and police checkpoints that line most roads in Aceh, an illegal ‘fee’ is usually demanded, making travel around the province somewhat more expensive than necessary. But, since the tsunami, military and police ‘business’ activities have been disrupted in the worst hit areas. In the devastated coastal areas of West Aceh, Aceh Besar, Banda Aceh, the northeast and others, there is no sign of the checkpoints or of those who lived and worked there; the former inhabitants deployed elsewhere to assist in the cleaning up operation. At checkpoints that remain operational in these tsunami hit areas, money is still extorted but much less so than in the past.

While the tsunami destroyed business opportunities for the military in some sectors, the devastation of 26 December brought ample new opportunity for profit. In the first few days after the tsunami, the military and some civilians were already looting houses and business premises that were left standing. An eyewitness explains:

“It was the day after the tsunami, I went to my house in Punge [in Banda Aceh] to check how it was. Actually, my house had collapsed. On the way, I saw some military troops go into houses and shops and take boxes full of things. I don’t know what was in the boxes, but they put them in military trucks. I also saw one soldier bend over the body of a dead woman. I think he was taking her gold rings or money.” (*Interview, Banda Aceh, 10 January, 2005*)

Growing evidence that profiteering was very much back on the agenda of the military began to surface with time. A member of staff with an international agency said:

“As the days passed we could see the military become much more inclined to ask for our paperwork, and on a few occasions we were denied access to certain areas around Meulaboh ‘for our own safety’. On one occasion, the military said a fee had been imposed for that stretch of road – to help with repairs. We were naïve, we paid Rp750,000.” (*Banda Aceh, 17 January, 2005*)

There is in fact, much anecdotal evidence to suggest that the military is in fact profiting from the relief effort. While it appears unlikely there is large scale organized theft of aid, members of the military and police are known to be siphoning supplies from the stock of general aid held at the distribution centres for their own use. They also make regular visits to the poskos to 'request' aid for the troops.

New Zealand's Foreign Minister, Phil Goff has asked the country's embassy in Jakarta to investigate allegations made by Newsweek magazine that the Indonesian military has been accepting bribes to allow people to fly out of Aceh on refugee flights (New Zealand Herald, 28 January, 2005). This request was made following a report by Newsweek magazine that half of those who flew on a Royal New Zealand Air Force flight from Aceh to Jakarta in January had paid up to US\$80 to the Indonesian military whose job it was to screen the passengers for refugees who were most in need.

The prevailing military culture in Aceh of greed and impunity, and of prioritising profit before peace, is a system that has been in place for almost 30 years. It is a system that has gone largely unchallenged; and one that will take some time to overcome.

INVOLVEMENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

The international presence in Aceh

It was three days after the tsunami that, the Indonesian government finally requested that the UN and others assist with the relief effort. Michael Elmquist, deputy chief of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) explained: "It wasn't until the late afternoon of 28 December 2004, that BAKORNAS PBP requested UN OCHA to assist in co-ordinating international relief aid and international aid workers to enter Aceh" (*Interview, Jakarta, 26 January 2005*). In fact, the international community was ready to respond to the disaster much earlier and dispatched emergency medical and rescue teams to standby in neighbouring areas to wait for permission to enter Aceh. After days of waiting, Aceh was at last opened: the international response was immediate. On the evening of 28 December 2004, a French based medical organization, Medicines sans Frontiers (MSF) moved a team it had on standby in North Sumatra into Aceh: two mobile clinics were operational by the following day (MSF press release, 29 December 2004). Many other international NGOs and foreign government relief teams followed. The government decision to open Aceh was a necessary and correct - if late - response to an unprecedented disaster.

A grateful but nervous Indonesian government, military and police watched as thousands of foreign aid workers and foreign military personnel flowed across the North Sumatra land border and began to arrive by air and sea. Of great significance to the emergency response was the fact that foreign militaries arrived in Aceh with helicopters, transport aircrafts and ships to facilitate the movement of logistics and key personnel to the areas that were cut off. Neighbouring countries such as Singapore and Malaysia provided early and critical assistance to Indonesia, and by 1 January, the American aircraft carrier, the USS Abraham Lincoln was leading US military relief efforts, and provided a base and transport from which other agencies were able to undertake assessments of the devastated west coast. In fact, it was the helicopters from the Abraham Lincoln that first reached the desperate survivors stranded in west Aceh, taking vital supplies of water, food and medicines. A TNI press release on 17 January noted that 4,478 foreign troops were already in Aceh (TNI Information Center (Puspen), 17 January 2005). Military assistance from the United States of America (USA), Singapore, Germany, Australia and others, helped with water purification, medical care, distributing food, providing tents and helping to clean out and rehabilitate hospitals. The province that had remained closed for so long was finally open. A joint Disaster Management Center (DMC) was established by the UN and the Indonesian government on 10 January to set priorities for the management and co-ordination of disaster relief.

The enormous relief effort took its toll on Aceh's weak infrastructure. Before the tsunami, the only international airport in Aceh, the Sultan Iskandar Muda airport in Banda Aceh, received less than ten flights a day. During the emergency response, more than 170 relief and passenger flights landed and departed daily on the small runways causing the tarmac to rupture and sink in places. This created new problems as the airport runways became flooded with rainwater and mud. Heavy lifting equipment, vehicles, construction equipment, and relief supplies were desperately needed, but careless planning caused even further damage. In late January, the US and Australian military humanitarian operation were moved to a new base on Sabang island where hard base parking was sufficient for small aircraft.

Overwhelming generosity

In rapid response to the disaster, global aid agencies launched urgent appeals for donations of food, medicines, clothing etc, and also for money. The level of public compassion and generosity these appeals attracted was rare. Foreign governments and international financial institutions also responded immediately and generously, preferring to pledge assistance to the general region-wide effort rather than to earmark specific amounts for certain countries.

Only a few days after the tsunami, the international community had already pledged a combined half-a-billion dollars in support to the affected countries in the region; that figure jumped to more than \$800 million by the end of December when the United States increased its pledge from US\$35 million to US\$350 million. On 6 January 2005, loans and grants were sought by the Indonesian President from a sympathetic international community:

“We have requested the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the Islamic Development Bank and other international financial institutions to provide the funds necessary to ensure the viability and sustainability of national rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes.”⁶

On the same day (6 January, 2005), the UN Secretary General launched a Flash Appeal and requested US\$977 million for immediate relief to the five worst affected countries in the region – \$371 million of which was for Indonesia. At a donor meeting in Geneva on 11 January 2005, 77% of this amount was pledged, paralleling the incredible generosity that was evident in response to appeals throughout the world.

A damage assessment by the Indonesian government together with several international donors, including the World Bank estimated the costs of ‘replacements’ (including lost income) in Aceh and North Sumatra to be US\$4.5 billion. This is equal to 97% of the gross domestic product (GDP) of Aceh.

In the first days after the tsunami, the European Union (EU) Commission immediately committed €23 million (US\$30 million) for emergency relief in the affected countries. On 6 January, the President of the Commission announced a further €450 million (US\$585) to the region as a whole, €100 million of that to be spent on short-term humanitarian needs.⁷ This brought total support from the EU Commission and the 25 EU member states to around €1.5 billion (approximately US\$2 billion). Further contributions from member states are expected to add to that figure. The Commission intends to allocate €200 million via the World Bank Trust Fund for Indonesia to assist in the task of rehabilitation and reconstruction.

As Indonesia's nearest neighbour, Australia announced on 5 January 2005, a \$1 billion Australian dollar contribution to a newly formed Australia-Indonesia Partnership for Reconstruction and Development (AIPRD). Announcing the offer, Prime Minister John Howard said the funds – available over five years – would prioritise the tsunami hit areas but would also benefit other areas of Indonesia. Of the \$1 billion contribution over five years,

\$500 million would be grant assistance and the other \$500 million would be interest-free loans for 'the reconstruction and rehabilitation of major infrastructure in the first instance.'

The American government also gave immediate assistance and made a further commitment to longer term support. In a statement released by the White House on 9 February, US President George Bush said:

"I will seek \$950 million as part of the supplemental appropriations request to support the areas recovering from the tsunami and to cover the costs of relief efforts to date... We will use these resources to provide assistance to work with the affected nations on rebuilding vital infrastructure that re-energizes economies and strengthens societies."⁸

In early January, the World Bank announced a new Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Government of Indonesia for reconstruction and rehabilitation activities in Aceh and North Sumatra committed to projects aimed at rebuilding communities and physical infrastructure through investments in housing, health, education, roads, and important social assets. The program brings together more than \$300 million in reconstruction funds through reallocation within existing projects and also new funds, nearly all in the form of grants and soft loans with zero interest and to be repaid over 40 years.

On 12 January, the Paris Club, a group of 19 creditor nations, announced that:

"Considering the exceptional scale and the devastating effects of this catastrophe... [The Paris Club] will not expect debt payments from affected countries that request such forbearance until the World Bank and the IMF have made a full assessment of their reconstruction and financing needs." (*Press release, 12 January 2005*)

One week later, the influential Consultative Group on Indonesia (CGI), a 30 member group of bilateral and multilateral donors, met to discuss the budgetary implications of the tsunami. It agreed a package of US\$1.7 billion reconstruction aid, US\$1.2 billion in grants, and US\$500 million in soft loans. This was in addition to the US\$2.8 billion in new loans that had already been approved.

The efforts mentioned above represent only an example of the international assistance pledged to the affected areas and to Indonesia. The list of donors is seemingly endless and is less important to note here, other than the fact that they provided enough money for the task at hand.

Some international NGOs and other organisations, overwhelmed by the amount of money they received, felt morally obligated to close their tsunami appeals. For example, included in this list is the American based charity Catholic Relief Services (CRS), which by early February had already received US\$126 million in donations. The CRS closed its appeal fearing its own lack of capacity to use any further funding effectively. Similarly, the UK Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC), an umbrella group for a dozen British charities, closed its Indian Ocean earthquake appeal – the biggest ever fundraising campaign in UK history – on February 26. The DEC said the total amount raised exceeded £300 million. British charities have separately raised another £60m-70m. Many other organisations such as the Australian Red Cross, MSF and others also closed appeals to raise money specifically for the tsunami. A member of Save the Children Fund commented: "This is the first time I've been involved in a relief effort where there is absolutely more money available than we actually need – we might even struggle to spend it" (*Interview, Banda Aceh, 23, January 2005*).

To allay concerns about the possibility of mismanagement of such large sums of money, the UN announced that it was working with the international auditor PriceWaterhouseCoopers to

strengthen “existing financial tracking systems and ensure transparency in the use of funds donated for the Flash Appeal” (*UN Press Release, 18 January, 2005, SG/SM/9679, GA/10327*). The auditing company has donated thousands of hours of advisory services to help ensure that the hundreds of millions of dollars available will be used for the purposes for which it is intended. A second example of the concern resulting from such large sums of money being made available is the EU’s plan to establish a ‘European House’ in Aceh to coordinate the efforts of its member states, and to monitor implementation and ensure transparency of resources.

International presence brings relief and new problems

A variety of groups arrived in Aceh: faith based, unions, students and women’s groups, and various community organisations from elsewhere in Indonesia and overseas. By 15 January, BAKORNAS PBP reported that 2,026 Indonesian nationals were registered as volunteers with the authorities while foreigners numbered 385. This number increased rapidly through January and February. In recognition of the need for more volunteers to help with the relief effort and to bury bodies and clear debris, the Indonesian government sponsored transport and logistics for many national groups to go to Aceh

While most people who went to Aceh simply wanted to help, some were driven by a more troubling set of motives. For example, several Indonesian Islamic groups have used the tsunami as an opportunity to enter Aceh after many years of being rejected by the Acehnese. Only two days after the tsunami, one such group, the Islamic Defense Front (Front Pembela Islam - FPI), sent hundreds of volunteers to Aceh. Transport was provided by the Indonesian government. A central board member of FPI said:

“We arrived in Aceh on 29 December 2004. Transport was provided by the Indonesian Department of Defence, food and other needs were supported by SATKORLAK PBP. The aim of our presence here is to help evacuate the bodies and we plan to stay longer to ensure shariah [Islamic] law will be enforced in Aceh.” (*Interview with a member of Central Board Council of FPI, Banda Aceh, 14 January 2005*)

FPI was praised by many locals for its role in the task of retrieving bodies, and clearing up. But many were wary because of the groups’ previous statements against independence for Aceh, and its known links to the government in Jakarta. Other similar groups also arrived in Aceh after the tsunami.⁹ The GAM and many Acehnese have, for many years, made efforts to distance themselves from these more radical Islamic elements in Indonesia. Moreover, the imposition of sharia [Islamic] law which came into force in Aceh in 2001, has never been strictly implemented in the province because of opposition by many local people.

Many Indonesian and international based groups that had previously shown little interest in Aceh suddenly arrived to help. For many years, Acehnese civil society groups have lobbied international human rights groups and others to take an interest in the issue of the conflict in Aceh. Such appeals were met largely with ineptitude. The tsunami has generated interest in Aceh, but done little to strengthen support for the issue of human rights in the province. Most international groups show little prospect of adopting a stance on this sensitive issue, preferring instead to protect their own in-country ‘interests’ rather than engage in what the Indonesian government insists is a domestic issue, and not the business of ‘outsiders’. Bank-rolled by the millions of dollars raised in the tsunami appeals, international groups quickly established ‘offices’ in Aceh, and rented large houses for staff and foreign volunteers to implement projects that are being planned for the coming five or more years. The ‘cost’ of ‘interfering’ in human rights might jeopardise such plans; it is this that explains the lack of willingness by so many to frame their work within the context of a conflict-ridden society.

Some foreign groups arrived in Aceh with very little knowledge of the local situation; of the culture, religion, and of the fact that Aceh was in a state of continuous and violent conflict.

While many of these groups worked comfortably within the Acehese context, some were less in tune with the local cultural and religious environment. One such example is the US based missionary group WorldHelp, whose lack of local understanding can be seen in their attempts to address the issue of orphans in Aceh. Initial fears that up to 40,000 children were orphaned by the tsunami led WorldHelp and other organisations, to plan to bring some of these children out of Indonesia. However, when news of this was heard in Aceh, there was an outcry from local people who insisted that the children should be cared for by members of extended family, friends and neighbours. The issue of human trafficking began to rear its head in the media, the Indonesian government intervened, saying no children should be taken out of province (*Washington Post*, 15 January, 2005).

A phenomenon not specific to the case of Aceh, but a common negative impact of relief efforts around the world, is that a dual economy develops. In Aceh, the large budgets available to international groups has led to a cavalier attitude when renting houses, vehicles, and paying for goods and services. For example, the cost of renting a house has increased 15 to 20 times (sometimes more). A four bedroom house in Banda Aceh that would have cost Rp 10 million before the tsunami is now anywhere between Rp 100 to 200 million. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) was not alone in paying as much as Rp 1 million per day to rent a house, several other media and other groups also committed this 'social crime'. With such inflated prices, people living in camps and in overcrowded houses, have little, if any, hope of being able – in the near future at least – to rent somewhere to live. In addition, in the first month or so of the response, there was little awareness about the need to assist the Aceh economy by buying local; everything was brought from overseas or from Medan instead of buying from unaffected areas in Aceh which were still able to supply at least some of the needs of the relief effort. Such lack of consideration is illustrated by the comments of a senior staff member of CRS working in the west coast of Aceh:

“It doesn't matter where we buy or how much it costs, I will source the material from China if I have to. The main criteria is that suppliers can get it to us quickly.” (*Interview, Medan, 19 January 2005*).

As the affluence of the international organisations and their staff became more visible, there was increasing disquiet among many local people about the cost of the foreign operations in Aceh. Was it really necessary to bring non-specialised vehicles from overseas, to have such large houses and offices for staff, and to pay inflated salaries and 'hardship' allowances? What was seen as a 'misuse' of donor's money offended many Acehese. Questions were being asked about the percentage of budgets assigned to overhead costs.

The life of an IDP

Characterised in the early days of the emergency by what can only be described as 'chaotic goodwill', the overall effectiveness of this enormous relief effort was patchy. In many of these camps, particularly in the first several weeks, lack of food, water and sanitation led many to leave, establishing alternative camps or seeking shelter with host families, thus making the relief effort even more difficult. Some camps erected by the government were left empty, testament to the fact that there had been no local consultation as to their location. Furthermore, assistance to IDPs was not evenly distributed. For the tens of thousands of people in smaller camps, in more remote areas, or displaced in the communities, help was much slower to arrive. There was in fact an initial reluctance to address the issue of those living outside official camps, while the local communities that hosted many family and friends from the devastated areas received little or no assistance:

“My cousin came from West Aceh. He lost everything, his wife, his 3 kids, his parents and the entire family – gone. He arrived with 40 other people, what could I do? Yes, they can stay in my house. The UN gave a small tent for some people to live in the garden, but they didn't give any food or help with sanitation. Now we are 41 people, the local

posko run by PCC [People's Crisis Centre – a local NGO] gives us food; they also sent a nurse to give medical help. I did try to ask international groups for help, but they all refused saying they don't give assistance to those in houses. They told me that the 41 people must go to a camp, then they will help. Never mind, they will stay with me and we will manage – somehow. They don't want to go to a camp, and I agree that they stay with me. *“(Interview, Banda Aceh, 21 January, 2005)”*

Local and international NGOs raced to stake a claim in camps by stringing 'advertising' banners with their names and logos at the entrance, assuming primary responsibility at these locations for providing certain types of logistic support. Agencies with specific expertise would often contribute other items; the result was that many camps in Aceh displayed several banners strung out around the entrance. In the best equipped camps, pour flush toilets were constructed, water tanks installed, bathing shelters and washing areas provided, and piping systems installed.

In contrast, many camps were, and some continue to be under-resourced and poorly managed. Not only with poor shelter facilities but also unfair distribution of aid; complaints of corruption and nepotism are common:

“The camp organisers are guilty of nepotism. They only distribute to the people that they know, not to those who need help. I have been here for 23 days, I have only been given rice and instant noodle, no vegetable or fruit, no cloths, no money. Some people got more, some people got nothing.’ *(Interview, Camp Ulee Kareng, Banda Aceh, 18 January 2005)*

There have also been complaints about lack of a nutritious diet. As the weeks passed, an increasing numbers of patients presented themselves to field clinics with stomach problems, headaches, feelings of nausea and ailments associated with poor diet, stress, and lack of sanitation. A typical food basket delivered to families was (and remains): instant noodle, white rice, cooking oil, sweet biscuits, tinned sardines, and sweetened fruit juice. In many camps, no fruit or vegetables were available until medical problems could no longer be ignored and some relief agencies began to include small quantities of fresh food with their distribution.

Further bad feeling was caused by some of the agencies who had 'staked a claim' in a particular shelter site, and then failed to fulfil promises made:

“The UPC [Urban Poor Consortium] promised us a meunasah [prayer house], but look – we still don't have one. They haven't even given us materials. They told us to collect wood etc from the debris. Then the Americans said they would help with money for cash-for-work to clear the debris and prepare to build. They put their flag here, but we took it down – they also haven't been back.” *(Interview, Meuraxa, 27 February, 2005)*

Similarly in West Aceh, grateful for assistance but disillusioned when the days dragged into weeks and still nothing of what they had been promised arrived. A camp resident complained:

“Many international agencies and foreign government staff have been to tell us not to worry, that they will help. But I'm still waiting – we are all waiting here. We see a few houses being erected, but very few and it seems there are so many foreigners but they produce very little. We wonder when, and we wonder if, we will get what they promise. Until then, we just live in the tent, we have no choice.” *(Interview, Meulaboh, 16 February, 2005).*

In general, camps along main roads, and in the larger towns and villages were serviced relatively well by this enthusiastic aid community, while those in the more remote areas were neglected. The gaps left by the multi million dollar international agencies were filled by smaller national and local NGOs who worked around the clock to distribute food and medical help. In the first weeks at least, these local groups did not have the quantity or quality of resources available to them that the internationals had:

“We are short of food and medicine, so we have concentrated our distribution to the villages, the internationals are covering the camps. From our observation, there are at least 500 people in each village area without food and clean water, and many are sick. They are sheltering in the villagers houses or partly ruined buildings. In the houses, the situation is very crowded; it is not unusual for between 30 – 50 people to be living in one house.” (*Interview, local NGO staff, Meulaboh, 29 January, 2005*)

But the larger international agencies continued to insist their priorities lay elsewhere, as seen by the following statement:

“Yes, we know there are thousands living in small camps and in overcrowded conditions in the communities, but we are, frankly, not willing to address this problem. If they want help, they must come to live in a camp. From a public health perspective, we would rather help those people who shelter in public IDPs camps, it’s easier for us; we can treat more people and more quickly.” (*Interview, MSF logistics officer, Banda Aceh, 11 January 2005*)

Initial poor coordination and cooperation between the various agencies involved in the relief effort diminished its effectiveness and caused unnecessarily prolonged suffering to many people who were sheltered in makeshift camps, in schools, mosques and other public places. The opening of a UN OCHA office in Banda Aceh began to address some of these problems. The office produced regular situation reports (sitreps) and hosted daily meetings of international agencies and NGOs. At these meetings, the exchange of information and coordination of the relief effort and the sharing of logistics and materials was the main agenda. A fatal weakness of these meetings was that very few local Acehnese groups participated, due in part to the language barrier (the meetings were in English), but also because of the perceived difficulties of obtaining a pass to enter. On several occasions, members of local NGOs were denied entry or ejected from the meetings because they had no ‘authority’ (badge) to be there.

Eventually, as the chaos gave way to familiarity and greater coordination, a process whereby the devastated areas were carved up by area and by sector, made the process of providing food, health care, water, shelter, and even some education, more efficient.

An issue that has become more problematic as time passes is that of security. There are increasing reports of military and police searching camps for members of GAM; arrest, intimidation and harassment – including of women – has become more common. In January, BAPPENAS and the international donor community published a Preliminary Damage and Loss Assessment in which it warned: “The subordinate position of women in society...makes them targets for physical attacks and abuse, blocks avenues for acquiring necessary skills, and limits their access to resources and power structures.” Yet the difficulties faced by many women in camps have been left largely unaddressed. The Aceh branch of the Commission for Disappearances and Torture (Kontras) reported that 50 incidents of violence against women were reported in the period January to March. This includes one forced disappearance, eight cases of arbitrary arrest and detention, and 41 cases of sexual violence or harassment.

It is fair to say that the life of an IDP has, in most cases, been improved by the assistance of these various actors. But, it must also be noted that the priorities of the IDPs are often not those of the agencies and organisations who assist them. The 'appropriateness' of the assistance being offered is still not evident to many of those who are displaced in Aceh; this issue has still to be fully addressed.

Uneasiness about a foreign presence

It was inevitable that eventually the Indonesian government and military would turn its attention toward the foreign presence in Aceh. As early as January 2005, the power struggle over whether to allow foreign troops to remain was being fought in central government between hardliners who argued that since the relief phase was coming to an end, there was no longer any need for foreign militaries or civilian relief workers to remain in Aceh, and those who saw a need for foreign technical assistance.

The more conservative politicians and military argued that foreign relief workers, including some foreign troops, might come to Aceh with a political agenda. And worse still, that they could be using the tsunami as a cover for trafficking supplies to GAM. Public statements to this effect were rapidly denied by the President:

"I hope all parties are thinking positively toward the foreign presence in Aceh which is purely on humanitarian purposes, their presence is nothing to do with politics; to suggest otherwise is very unhealthy while we are dealing with the disaster." (*Serambi Indonesia*, 9 January 2005)

Despite this denial by Susilo, Indonesian media later quoted Vice President Kalla saying that all foreign military troops and individuals should leave by 26 March 2005 (*Media Indonesia*, 15 January 2005). Amid the confusing signals, it remained quite clear that Indonesia had limited capacity to adequately deal with the emergency situation, that the necessity for the foreign presence was recognised by many in government, including the President.

The solution of compromise agreed between the moderate and conservative factions of the government and military was to restrict movement: all foreigners, including aid workers, would not be permitted to travel outside Banda Aceh or Meulaboh, the two areas worst affected by the tsunami, without prior permission of the military. Some local military commanders were however nervous, even angry, with the foreign presence. Landing by helicopter to deliver aid in Calang (on the west coast of Aceh), the coordinator of an international NGO experienced such sentiments first hand:

"I got out of the helicopter before the others and was immediately surrounded by 20 military with guns raised. I guess it was the commander who shouted 'Get out of here, take one more step and I will have you shot. Get out, you are not needed. Out!'" (*Interview, Banda Aceh, 29 January, 2005*).

That was the group's third delivery of the day, but the first sign of trouble. Feeling afraid and uncertain of their security, the aid workers made a decision to abandon the other two scheduled stops and return to Banda Aceh.

Movement remains restricted, and just as government paranoia hampered the emergency effort in the early days, it now poses an obstacle to the rehabilitation and reconstruction phases. It is quite clear that support is growing for those conservative elements in government who would prefer to see Aceh remain closed. Levels of bureaucracy have increased; foreign agencies and NGOs have expressed frustration at a government decision to scrutinise all NGOs and others to evaluate *if* and *how* their expertise can contribute to the

next phase of what has become the 'Aceh project.' Those whose contribution is not significant will be asked to leave.

LOOKING TOWARDS THE FUTURE

Beyond instant noodles and sardines

Forward planning and a little national pride appeared in the rhetoric of senior Indonesian government members as early as one week after the tsunami:

"The emergency rescue phase, and rehabilitation and reconstruction phases should be implemented together because of the lack of time. We must show the international community that we are able to stand up again, that the Acehnese are able to rebuild again." (*Vice President Yusuf Kalla, 4 January 2005*)

Ten working groups were established by the central government to conceptualise and execute plans for the rehabilitation and reconstruction process. Established in January, these working groups are: land management; environment and natural resources; public facilities; economy and workforce; organisational system; social, culture and human resources; law enforcement; security and reconciliation; accountability, and budget and finance.¹⁰

The international community also quickly turned its attention to issues of rehabilitation and longer term planning. In January, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) announced that its four priority areas would be: (1) Immediate employment and rehabilitation through cash-for-work; (2) Recovery of livelihoods; (3) Recovery of housing, settlements and associated infrastructure; (4) Capacity-building of Government and civil society for sustainable recovery and risk-reduction.¹¹

The UN began to take the lead in attempting to gain an overall perspective of what was actually required in Aceh. In a press briefing by OCHA on 10 January, it was announced that the World Health Organisation (WHO) and other UN agencies, together with some NGOs would begin the first of a series major assessments to take place throughout the province. In the period 11-17 January, as many as 40 assessments were conducted on immediate health needs, as well as water and sanitation. Such initiatives, usually begun by international groups, were often conducted in cooperation with local or national government departments. These rapid assessments formed the basis of the international, and to some extent, the national response to the humanitarian crisis and longer term planning.

In mid January, BAPPENAS hosted a 'National Dialogue on Planning, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction for Aceh and North Sumatra'. Several meetings were held that included national and local government departments, Acehnese public figures, academics, selected NGOs and several other parties. Unfortunately, as is typical of such consultations, women were under-represented in terms of both number and variety of perspectives. The blueprint produced as a result of this process was finally opened for broader public consultation on 1 March 2005.

Even before the blueprint was drafted, the government had identified three phases of the disaster response in Aceh. These three phases are explained by the President as:

"Immediate term - 1 year: The objective is emergency rescue, emergency food supply, replacing basic infrastructure, and burying of bodies. *Short term* - 1.5 to 2 years: Focus on rehabilitation to restore public services to minimum requirements, such as economic facilities, banking and financial institutions, social treatments, secure land rights, and to

restore law and order mechanisms. *Long term - 5 years: Reconstruction phase, aiming to rebuild and revitalise the area, including the economy (production, trade, banking), transportation and telecommunications, and rehabilitate social and cultural life.” (President Susilo Yudhoyono speech at the ASEAN Leaders Summit, Jakarta, 6 January, 2004)*

A prerequisite for the implementation of such plans is that at least the main functions of local government are restored. On 26 January 2005, the Department of the Interior announced a three-phase plan to restore the functioning local government and its infrastructure. The department estimated that it will take five years for all local government departments and services to be fully operational.

To facilitate this, and to compensate to some degree for government officials lost in the tsunami, the Minister of the Interior assigned 356 civil servants from Jakarta to help ‘normalise’ the local government in the province, including sending the team to clear the building of government offices.

Livelihoods

According to the Asian Development Bank (ADB), poverty will be one of the worst legacies of the tsunami. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has estimated unemployment in Aceh could rise to 30 percent. In January, the ILO was already calling for ‘employment-intensive’ job creation strategies to be integrated into humanitarian and reconstruction responses.

In an effort to speed up the clearing of debris and bodies, thousands of survivors were recruited to clean up government buildings, schools and hospitals, as well as residential areas. The UNDP, USAID, and non-governmental organizations such as Oxfam and international relief organisation Mercy Corps are among those who have implemented these ‘cash-for-work’ schemes. The average salary is between Rp 30,000 – 40,000 per day (US\$3.2 – 4.3); a small amount considering the inflated prices of food and other items since the tsunami. Local people, eager to earn money for their families, and to restore some dignity and self-control in their lives, were only too happy to participate. USAID has alone provided more than US\$1.1 million for the implementation of cash-for-work programs (*US Embassy Press Release, 24 January 2005*).

These schemes were instrumental in the rapid restoration of facilities such as hospitals and schools in the affected areas. Similar programmes were undertaken in Meulaboh, and in many other tsunami affected areas around Aceh. These schemes became increasingly popular among local and international NGOs, the UN and other agencies: there was no shortage of willing workers.

The ILO established a team in Aceh as early as 24 January to establish an emergency public employment services network. The Employment Service for the People of Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam Province (ESPNAD) opened early February for registration of local people searching for work, and to provide a service of matching jobs with job seekers. The centre also gives advice to the unemployed, acts as a centre for planning and dissemination of information on the increasing number of training courses available in Aceh such as computing, English language courses, construction skills, and many others. Similar initiatives have been planned elsewhere in Aceh.

Housing

With more than 400,000 people displaced, and with a severe shortage of available housing, a consensus was reached by the government, the UN and other international agencies that the displaced should be moved from tents and makeshift camps, into barrack housing. But many Acehnese view such a strategy as an ‘inappropriate’ response to the housing problem

– even on a temporary basis. The government announced 24 initial locations and said each barrack would consist of 12 to 20 units of 3x4 meters for each family, and included only a roof overhang under which meals could be cooked. This design was later modified, allocating 4x5 m per family, and including separate buildings for cooking and washing. This plan was to be implemented in stages: Phase I plan was to move 14,000 families to 24 sites by 15 February 2005. Phase 2, involving many more people, would be complete by 15 March. It is planned that 150,000 tsunami survivors will be housed in these temporary barracks for up to two years while other longer term housing is being built.

Phase I was implemented to schedule: by mid February, some of those who lost their homes in the tsunami were being moved – under military escort – to what would be their new home for the next two years. Chief of the Barrack Development Unit for Acehese IDPs, Totok Pri, said that the relocation would continue each day for one month, as several hundred blocks of barracks became available for more than 9,000 families (*Serambi, 15 February, 2005*). By the end of February, 142 of the 397 completed barracks were occupied and the numbers of planned barracks had increased to 997 units (*BAKORNAS PBP, 28 February, 2005*).

There is widespread dissatisfaction of government policy to relocate people to barracks far from their original villages. Most people prefer to remain in the area that is familiar to them, and many have refused to move to barracks, returning instead to their villages to clean and begin to rebuild houses using wood and other material from the debris. For many, this 'returning home' process is necessary for them to overcome the trauma of the events of 26 December:

“Before the tsunami, there were more than 3,000 people in my village of Lamjabat, Banda Aceh. But only 175 people survived in our community – only around 50 of this total are women. We do not want to be relocated to the barracks by the government, but we want to rebuild our lives together with other survivors in Lamjabat. The only way we can cope with this disaster is by keeping alive our memory of those we lost. If we stay together, we can talk about those people to keep them alive in our thoughts. But, if we are forced to move to the barracks, so far from the place of our friends and relatives, the memories will die, just as the people have.” (*Interview, Banda Aceh, 29 January 2005*)

In an attempt to address the widespread dissatisfaction with the barrack housing option, some international agencies began to offer knock down detached houses as an alternative. These houses can be easily moved from one location to another, and have proven more popular in some villages. But many Acehese also reject this; preferring to design and reconstruct their own homes. More recently, some agencies have begun to respond to this by providing building materials and tools.

Education

Among the many things that give people a sense of hope for the future in a disaster zone is when schools begin to reopen. Even if these schools are only temporary and based in camps, it gives hope to see children in a friendly learning environment, beginning to overcome the trauma of a bad experience, and to know their future is at least beginning to normalise. Cash-for-work programmes helped to prepare buildings for schools to reopen, and UNICEF assisted the Indonesian government to recruit and train 2,500 new teachers and also gave support and counselling to those teachers who survived to enable them to return to work. Tents were provided specifically for schools. Some schools reopened on 10 January 2005, but only 20% of students were present (*Serambi Indonesia, 11 January 2005*). Many other schools opened in the following weeks.

Several thousand 'school in a box' kits were sent to Aceh by UNICEF and other agencies. Each 'box' contained enough supplies for up to 100 children. Recreational boxes were also sent to help the children begin play to relieve stress. An estimated 177,000 children in Aceh

are now reliant on these temporary classrooms, but learning tools have been provided for more than 500,000.

Health Sector

The international presence in Aceh made significant contributions to the Indonesian government's own efforts to rehabilitate the damaged health sector. As well as establishing walk-in clinics, temporary hospitals including surgical facilities, and reopening local health centres, the presence of foreign transport facilities provided floating hospitals, and also air transport to take the injured and sick from the devastated areas to these facilities. By 4 February 2005 (day 40), 8 field hospitals had been established, two ship hospitals and the main general hospital in Banda Aceh was being run jointly by medical teams from Singapore, China, Belgium, Germany, and Australia (*BAKORNAS PBP, 5 February 2005*).

Many of those who were not able to reach existing puskesmas or hospitals simply died from their wounds or illness, and many lost limbs due to delays in treatment. The easiest way to help people was to place medical facilities in the remote and devastated areas rather than to transport them to hospitals in main towns or centres. To achieve this, 55 puskesmas (small clinics) were established and 880 health professionals were recruited to staff them. Each of these centres received placement of 3 midwives, 2 doctors, 6 nurses and other staff including paramedics (*Health Department, 11 February 2005*).

Psychosocial problems became more evident as time passed. A WHO rapid assessment estimates that up to 50% of the affected population may be experiencing significant psychological distress and 5-10% may develop a diagnosable stress-related psychiatric disorder as a result of the disaster in Aceh. Some people tell stories of how when they close their eyes at night, they see again the terrible events they experienced on 26 December.

“At that time, after the strong earth quake, all the buildings in front of my house collapsed, then I went with my wife and kids to see if anyone was covered by the debris. Suddenly, from far away, we saw people were running and shouting: ‘run...water is coming’. I told my wife to go home and go to the second floor, but she did not want to do that. She told me ‘better if we run.’ But after we ran about 500 meters, the wave hit us, my wife and kids were swept from my hands. A few hours after the disaster, I went to search for them, but I found nothing, and my house was completely gone. I only found the dead bodies of some children – my daughter's friends. I felt really sad, now I have lost every thing. I know if I keep thinking about that disaster, I might have mental stress. Five of my friends tried to commit suicide after searching for their families for many days. The worst time is at night when I have no one to talk to.” (*Interview, Lhok'nga, 15 January 2005*)

Several rapid assessments showed the specific needs of vulnerable groups, especially women, were not being met. As an example, there were 11,350 pregnant women known to be living in camps, but they received no additional nutrients or specialized healthcare.¹² On 9 February, the Health Department met with a consortium of UN agencies and international NGOs to discuss the situation of women and children. The aim was to coordinate an effort to make available specialised healthcare for pregnant and lactating women, and to pay special attention to the health needs of women and children. In partnership with local health authorities, UNICEF committed resources to establish reproductive health posts, and to provide sufficient midwifery kits to cover the entire province. Other assistance to women from a variety of groups included personal hygiene kits, reproductive health kits including midwifery kits, and clean delivery kits.

The Indonesian government has estimated that Rp4.574 trillion is required to rehabilitate and reconstruct the basic health service in Aceh including hospitals and puskesmas, and to provide new health equipment and training (*Health Department, 28 January 2005*).

Conclusion

The unpredicted events of 26 December 2004 changed the face of Aceh – at least temporarily – from a closed and little known or understood conflict area in a remote part of Indonesia, to a disaster zone into which thousands of international relief workers poured. The province became ‘over-exposed’ in the international media where previously there had been little or no coverage of the area.

The relief efforts of the Indonesian government and its agents have been remarkable, but a case of wilful neglect is also apparent when one considers that many thousands died in the first few days when Aceh remained closed as a power struggle between hard-liners and moderate elements in the government and military took place in Jakarta. But, even the Indonesian military – that most despised of all government actors in Aceh – deserves some credit for the critical role it played in the rescue and relief operation. At the same time, the security forces must be held accountable for continuing accusations of intimidation and harassment, including against women, and for at times posing an obstacle to distribution efforts, as well as ‘mismanagement’ and theft of relief supplies.

The arrival of assistance from the international community gave an immeasurable boost to the Indonesian emergency effort which had very limited capacity in terms of hardware, expertise and immediate large sums of money needed to purchase large quantities of aid and high value equipment. Both the Acehnese and the Indonesian government were grateful for such an outpouring of international solidarity in the face of such overwhelming tragedy.

However, sporadic statements by some in the military and senior government ministers, throwing into doubt the sustainability of the international presence in Aceh, has ensured a compliant and malleable relief and donor community. Criticism about over-bureaucratisation of the relief effort, and of the military’s intervention in the process, has been silenced by self-censorship of the internationals in order to serve their own interests. Such self interest also prevents the issue of continuing human rights abuses in Aceh being discussed or incorporated into the work plans of any UN or foreign government agencies, or international NGOs. It seems that there is no space within the humanitarian effort for the protection of economic, social and political rights of the Acehnese people.

Not so long ago, the war in Aceh was receiving very little attention internationally. But the tsunami has catapulted the issue onto the world stage: the door to Aceh is open, her secrets are unfolding. The international aid community is however, reluctant to hear. Past exploitation of Aceh’s natural resources, of her people and of their land and culture must not be repeated by an international community greedy for new markets and for ‘opportunities’.

The Acehnese people are those least represented in processes of consultations on rehabilitating their homeland. It seems they have been almost forgotten by the international community, the Indonesian government, and elite Indonesian and Acehnese minorities who stand to gain most from the billions of dollars that will pour into Indonesia in the coming years for the reconstruction of Aceh.

In contrast to current practice, the economic, social and political rights of the Acehnese people must be at the forefront of all consultations and planning relating to the rehabilitation of the province, and also in implementation, and evaluation of the process. Whether it be livelihoods, housing, education, health or other sectors, models from around the world cannot be transplanted into Aceh without due consideration to cultural and religious norms and practices, and more importantly, without primary consideration that the framework within which this process is taking place is one of continuing and violent conflict.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Indonesian government:

- Guarantee long term access to the international community to assist in the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Aceh.
- Refrain from unproductive threats to expel relief agencies and their workers as this serves only to instil suspicion and ill will between national, local and international aid mechanisms.
- Make a commitment to continue with the current peace talks in a spirit of genuine cooperation and accommodation. And include civil society in the formal process, including women.
- Prioritise humanitarian issues in the peace process, and to focus on building trust and confidence between the two parties in the dialogue before pursuing a long term solution to the political dispute.
- Enter into a process of genuine consultation with a broad spectrum of Acehnese groups to discuss the reconstruction of Aceh. Go one stage further with community-led decision-making as one of the central components in the process.
- Ensure transparency and accountability of funds dedicated to the rehabilitation and reconstruction process, and ensures the results of audits are made available to the public.
- Ensure that, to the degree possible, sustainable resources are utilised for reconstruction. As reconstruction of housing and other buildings, boats for fishing and other livelihood necessities gain momentum, increasing pressure will be brought to bear on Aceh's and Indonesia's natural resources. In particular, it is likely that illegal logging might increase. Efforts should be made to ensure the rights of those affected by the tsunami to use their own natural resources.

To the international community:

- Encourage the Indonesian government and the GAM to continue to dialogue in an attempt to reach at least a ceasefire, and to include elements of Acehnese civil society in that process – including women.
- Ensure the aid commitment to Aceh is without conditions or restrictions, and is available for priorities as determined by the Acehnese communities themselves.
- Facilitate a process whereby community based organisations and others can be engaged in broad consultation about the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Aceh.
- Insist and ensure that women are fairly represented in any consultative or decision making process about the current and future rehabilitation and restructuring of Aceh.
- Overcome the prevailing reluctance to criticise the Indonesian government about obstacles to the relief effort that are clearly politically motivated.
- Ensure transparency and accountability of income and outgoings of all budgets, and to investigate further when signs of mismanagement or bad management appear.
- Cease the current trend of paying excessively inflated rents, salaries and prices for goods and services which creates a dual economy leading to divisions in local communities.

To the GAM

- Insist that the mandate of the current peace talks should prioritise humanitarian issues before beginning discussion of the larger, and more difficult political issues.
- Allow representatives from civil society to be included in the formal process, and take steps to ensure the inclusion of a representative number of women.
- Present its own blueprint for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Aceh, and to make suggestions on how GAM should and could participate in this process.

¹ In 2001, Aceh was officially renamed Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam (NAD), but is usually referred to as Aceh.

² Pacific Disaster Management Information Network, 7 January 2005.

³ Secretary-General Kofi Annan at the Special Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Leaders' Meeting on the Aftermath of the Earthquake and Tsunamis, in Jakarta, Indonesia, 6 January 2005.

⁴ 'Issues of Economy and Employment', Bappenas, 26 January 2005.

⁵ For more detail, see at <http://www.bakornasppb.go.id/html/satkorlak.htm>

⁶ Opening remarks by Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono at the Special ASEAN Leader's meeting on the Aftermath of the Earthquake and Tsunami, Jakarta, 6 January, 2005.

⁷ Special ASEAN Leaders' Meeting in Jakarta, 6 January, 2005.

⁸ White House Press Release: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/02/20050209-18.html>.

⁹ Other groups included the Indonesian Mujahid Council and Pemuda Pancasila.

¹⁰ Announced by the Secretariat for the Rehabilitation and Reconstruction of Aceh and North Sumatra, 28 January 2005

¹¹ See http://www.undp.or.id/tsunami/view_update.asp?date=20050201.

¹² Detail please see further detail at report on UN activities for the 1st month after the earthquake and tsunami disaster, 9 February 2005