COLLABORATION AMONG NGOs IN REBUILDING POST-TSUNAMI ACEH, 2006-2007: A CASE STUDY IN INTERORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BRR	Badan Rehabilitasi dan Rekonstruksi NAD-Nias Agency for the Rehabilitation and Reconstruction of Aceh-Nias
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GAM	Gerakan Aceh Merdeka Free Aceh Movement
IASC	Interagency Standing Committee
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
ILO	International Labor Organization
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
LRWG	Livelihoods Recovery Working Group
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SDCM	Sub District Coordination Mechanism
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UN IAS	UNORC Information Analysis Section
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNORC	United Nations Office of Recovery Coordinator for Aceh and Nias

USAHA SAMA DI ANTARA ORGANISASI BUKAN KERAJAAN (NGO) DALAM PROSES PEMBINAAN KEMBALI ACEH PASCA TSUNAMI, 2006-2007: SATU KAJIAN KES KOMUNIKASI ANTARA ORGANISASI

ABSTRAK

Projek ini mengkhusus kepada proses kerjasama pembangunan NGO (Organisasi Bukan Kerajaan) yang berpusat di Aceh, Indonesia selama dua tahun selepas tragedi tsunami. Interaksi di dalam organisasi ini diteliti dalam satu kajian ethnografik yang dijalankan pada tahun-tahun 2006-2007. Projek ini cuba menerangkan kaitan di antara kerjasama di antara organisasi dengan keberkesanan kerja-kerja pemulihan dan pembangunan. Walaupun terdapat banyak cabaran untuk menjalinkan kerjasama, namun kajian berpendapat bahawa cabaran yang paling penting ialah cabaran bekerjasama. Pripentingnya boleh dilihat apabila kesan keseluruhan usaha pembangunan diteliti berbanding dengan kesan satu-satu project atau satu-satu NGO.

Selepas menganalisa nilai bekerjasama, projek ini menerangkan dan menilai beberapa struktur kerjasama yang terdapat di Aceh. Stuktur-struktur ini terdiri daripada yang formal – dipandukan oleh pihak berkuasa – dan yang tidak formal, yang diorganisasikan secara tersendiri di antara dan di dalam organisasi. Setiap struktur mempunyai kekuatan yang tersendiri disamping menghadapi beberapa cabaran. Menerusi analysis struktur-struktur ini kepentingan kerjasama yang dimulakan dan dipandukan oleh kerajaan Indonesia dan Bangsa-bangsa Bersatu dimaklumi, terutamanya untuk kerjasama yang memerlukan sumbangan pihak berkuasa. Bagi fungsi kerjasama yang lain, kekuatan kerjasama informal diterangkan, terutamanya dari segi peningkatan kepercayaan dan fleksibiliti yang dijanakan.

Kajian ini menghasilkan rangka empat fasa untuk proses kerjasama di antara organisasi yang menolong mementingkan beberapa fungsi kerjasama semasa fasa-fasa tertentu pemulihan dan pembangunan. Tambahan, kajian berpendapat bahawa kerjasama perlu disedari sebagai prinsip pembangunan di atara NGO. Semua ini dimajukan bersama-sama dengan beberapa cadangan praktikal untuk menangani masalah-masalah proses kerjasama.

COLLABORATION AMONG NGOs IN REBUILDING POST-TSUNAMI ACEH, 2006-2007: A CASE STUDY IN INTERORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

ABSTRACT

This project focuses on the collaboration process of development NGOs (Non Governmental Organizations), working in Aceh, Indonesia nearly two years after the Indian Ocean tsunami. The interactions among these organizations are organized into a case study based on ethnographic interview research carried out in 2006-2007. The project seeks to explain the relationship between interorganizational collaboration and the overall effectiveness of relief and development work. While many of the challenges to collaboration are noted, the overwhelming consensus from interviews and external sources highlights the importance of collaboration. Its significance is especially apparent when looking at the cumulative effect of the development efforts, as opposed to just one project or NGO.

After analyzing the value of collaboration, this project goes on to describe and evaluate various structures of collaboration used in Aceh. These structures range from formal, authority-driven structures to self-organizing collaboration. Each structure has particular strengths, while facing its own challenges. Through the analysis of these structures, the importance of government or United Nations-driven collaboration is noted, especially for the collaboration functions that require the use of authority. To serve other collaboration functions, the strengths of informal collaboration are explained, especially in terms of the increased trust and flexibility it provides.

The research led to a four-phase framework for the collaboration process, which helps to prioritize various collaboration functions during specific phases of relief and development. In addition, the research found that collaboration must be recognized as a development principle among NGOs themselves. These conclusions come alongside an explanation of practical suggestions to encourage and address problems in the collaboration process.

INTRODUCTION

I.0 Introduction

"There's little or no collaboration, but because everyone's trying to find their niche, it's loosely coordinated—negative coordination, not positive coordination." [1] This statement came from a consultant agronomist who had been living and working in Aceh, Indonesia for over a year. He was describing the coordination, or lack thereof, that took place after the tsunami. His experience ties into a much larger issue within relief and development work. In fact, within the activities of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) across the world, many have pointed out an unwillingness, inability, and/or ineffectiveness of NGOs to work together. Both practitioners and academics have seen how this lack of cooperation can hinder progress on a macro level, as well as hamper the effectiveness of individual projects.

For example, in summarizing the implications of thirty case studies on agricultural development, Farrington and Lewis (1993) explain, "As the densities of NGOs operational at field level increase, the need for institutionalized means of communication (and, where appropriate, co-ordination) among NGOs and between NGOs and government will become all the more urgent" (p. 337). Similarly, in reference to international disaster relief operations, Green (1977) writes, "This system is complex, if not chaotic… In fact, it is a non-system, a series of ad hoc responses to the differing circumstances and geographical locations of each major emergency" (p. 30). This ad hoc and chaotic nature of relief points to deeper issues of communication and coordination difficulties.

Even those directly involved with relief and development make similar observations. For example, Oxfam, the well-known British NGO published its perspective on coordination. The *Oxfam Handbook* reads, “It [an Oxfam-funded research project] proposes inter-agency co-ordination and collaboration based on the idea of principled pragmatism” (Eade & Williams, 1995, p. 866). The *Handbook* goes on to explain Oxfam’s value on working with other organizations, while pointing out the difficulties involved.

This concept of “principled pragmatism” is largely the focus of this project. Here, I take it to mean, quite simply, that the overall development effort is more effective if all the players work together. The question is: is this true? If it is, and coordination really is central to development, how does coordination become a reality instead of just a principle? This project is designed to dig into these issues. Looking through some of the theories communication scholars have developed, the aim is to get a clear understanding of what the collaboration looks like in a specific situation. The next step is to understand the effectiveness or lack thereof that results from those collaboration efforts. Finally, if possible, the hope is to uncover principles that address and overcome the difficulties involved.

Before this project became a formal project, it evolved into its current form. It all started with a desire to address community development through the context of communication studies. That desire progressed into informal discussions with a number of practitioners, largely people working at the field level of development organizations. In asking about the core communication issues within development work, interactions among NGOs arose as not only a key issue, but also one of experienced difficulty. Looking at NGO interactions was intriguing because it was essentially a study of interorganizational communication, a field of communication that scholars have been looking into recently. As a result, the focus of the project emerged, and the conceptual framework took shape.

During that process, I made the decision to use an anthropological approach. In essence, I would collect data on these NGO interactions through becoming a participant observer. This research would lead to a case study centered in Banda Aceh, Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam, Indonesia. That meant completing on-the-ground fieldwork, studying the organizations involved in the relief, reconstruction, and long-term development of Aceh. Moreover, based on the conceptual framework, it meant looking at the structures of collaboration in place. This sort of qualitative research largely relied on conducting interviews, attending meetings, and making observations. With that experience and information, an understanding of coordination within this context would become possible.

I.1 Research Questions

With a qualitative methodology chosen, the core research questions finally took shape. The primary questions include: What is the relationship between interorganizational collaboration and overall effectiveness? What are the strengths and weaknesses of a hierarchical approach versus a self-organizing systems approach to interorganizational collaboration among development NGOs?

This second question asks about a concept that came out during a pilot study for this project. Some see collaboration as an official meeting or a specific task that an authority carries out. Others see collaboration as utilizing a series of informal networks. While the explanation of self-organizing systems will be filled out in chapter two, it is important to note that a continuum of collaboration structures exist. On one end lies enforced, formal collaboration, while informal, network-based collaboration lies on the other end. For the purposes of this project, even informal networks are identified as structures, just on the opposite end of the spectrum than official or formal structures.

I.2 Objectives

To answer these questions, there are six objectives: (1) To document NGO perceptions toward the effect of NGO collaboration on overall effectiveness. (2) To document NGO experience with various types of interorganizational communication. (3) To document the perceived successes and failures of NGO collaboration by NGOs themselves. (4) To document the specific development context in Banda Aceh, Indonesia and its implications on the first three objectives. (5)To assess how the various types of interorganizational communication used is related to the perceived success and/or failure of collaboration. (6) To identify potentially effective forms of interorganizational communication, and how to implement them.

The first objective, to document NGO perceptions toward the effect of NGO collaboration on overall effectiveness, essentially asks NGOs to self-evaluate. It is an attempt to answer the first research question, by relying on individuals directly involved in the collaboration efforts. Certainly, a large-scale study could be completed to answer this question in a more quantitative sense, but to narrow the scope into a masters thesis, self-evaluation was felt to be sufficient. Moreover, with the help of external reports and the brutal honesty of some “off the record” interviews, this question could still be addressed in a meaningful manner.

The second objective, to document NGO experience with various types of interorganizational communication, is really the meat of the study. To be able to do any evaluation, it is essential to first understand what sorts of collaboration are going on. With the opportunity to experience most of these forms first hand, a nearly complete understanding of how organizations collaborate is possible.

The third objective, to document the perceived successes and failures of NGO collaboration by NGOs themselves, is again asking NGOs to self-reflect. They are better able than most to understand which efforts have worked and which have failed. Many interviews turned up stories that illuminated what sorts of collaboration efforts have been worthwhile, and vice versa. This identification of past success and failures provides the background for the analysis.

The fourth objective, to document the specific development context in Banda Aceh, Indonesia and its implications on the first three objectives, means compiling data on the location of the case study. Filling in the background for a case study location is important in any situation; however, development work is so dependent on its context that collecting background information is particularly important for this project. Moreover, understanding the situation at large helps to verify information from informants and evaluate the situation in terms of larger development principles.

The fifth objective, to assess how the various types of interorganizational communication used is related to the perceived success and/or failure of collaboration, is essentially the analysis that ties the second and third objectives together. It looks at how the types of collaboration relate to the perceived successes and failures. Again, this objective relies heavily on the informants, and it allows for a critical analysis of these types of collaboration.

Finally, the sixth objective, to identify potentially effective forms of interorganizational communication, and how to implement them, starts to answer the questions of “so what” and “where to go from here.” It means taking the analysis from objective five and turning it back towards the situation in Aceh, as well as other development contexts. There is need for caution here, as the results of one case study cannot be over-generalized; however, the principles uncovered here may well be helpful or beneficial.

I.3 Limitations

As may be evident from this description of the objectives, there are a number of limitations to this study. The first limitation is in relation to scope. Even in choosing one city for a case study, there are still an overwhelming number of organizations involved and many different types of projects and approaches. For the scope of a masters project undertaken by only one researcher, a focus on the entire set of organizations involved simply is not feasible. Issues of narrowing the sample size, as discussed in the chapter three, certainly limit the study. Furthermore, the sample is not a random sample, and the location of this case study has been exceptional because of the history of conflict and the enormity of the disaster it experienced. In essence, the same reasons that make it a useful and insightful case study are also limitations of the study.

One of the most significant limitations and challenges from the beginning was gaining access to the appropriate individuals, organizations, and meetings. Because the research did not begin with connections already established in Aceh or in the development world, I had to begin from nothing. Ultimately, the results I found are based on the contacts established during the research, which of course ties into the results themselves. The process of establishing those contacts and a description of the validity of the respondents can be found in chapter three.

There are additional limitations because of my personal background. First of all, being Caucasian in Indonesia makes me stand out. Being white in a non-white context comes along with certain hierarchy, trust issues, and historical colorings. In addition, my limited use of the Indonesian and Acehnese languages made interacting with local communities and local NGOs a challenge. Essentially, the research had to be shaped around both of these limitations, although experiencing these particular issues personally did aid in understanding the experience of foreign NGO employees.

Moreover, fairly limited academic research has been published on interorganizational communication. As a result, this project had a limited amount of background material to start with. Developing the theoretical framework necessitated utilizing theories and frameworks from other disciplines. Certainly, if interorganizational communication continues to grow, the limited amount of background material will not be a limitation in the future.

I.4 Motivating Factors

Nonetheless, there were many reasons why I saw this project as a worthwhile pursuit. As described above, collaboration among NGOs is an issue both academics and practitioners have highlighted. Even while I was conducting research, numerous NGO and government staff requested my results. It became clear that interactions with other agencies are real and important issues for many NGOs.

In addition, only a small amount of research has been completed on the topic. Interorganizational communication is only beginning as a field of study, and additional research on related topics can contribute by providing theories and frameworks to better understand the issues involved. Potentially, projects such as this one will help bring about more of a focus on this sub-field.

Also, this project's practicality is worthwhile to note. Every year, billions of dollars are spent in the name of relief and development. Specifically in the case of Aceh, a significant proportion of funding was wasted, according to interviews with senior representatives of multiple large NGOs. This waste, while a product of many factors, is related to the collaboration, or the lack thereof. The Oxfam concept of "principled pragmatism" could affect how much aid money is wasted.

Finally, and potentially most importantly, collaboration ties in to larger development principles. The very organizations involved in development—despite having many different mandates and understandings of development—are the very organizations that do or do not collaborate. A development project does not happen in a vacuum, no matter what its goals happen to be. Moreover, some see coordination itself as a development principle, and the ways organizations interact relate to the cumulative effect of the organizations at the community level.

I.5 Chapter Overview

Motivated by these arguments and guided by these questions, this project is divided into five chapters. The first chapter contains a literature review, outlining the development and communication theories on which this project is based. The second chapter includes a brief description of Aceh, Indonesia, including its history and conflict, as well as the tsunami and its implications. The third chapter describes the methodology utilized in carrying out this research. The fourth chapter contains the findings and analysis of this research, and the fifth chapter summarizes and concludes the project.

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[1] From an interview on 16 November 2006. The respondent was male, Canadian, and working for an international organization.

CHAPTER 1
THE STORY OF ACEH

1.1 Introduction

Aceh, Indonesia has a unique and rich history. Looking back many years, its story is one of prominence in world trade, leading to great wealth, while at the same time, its story is one of the struggle against colonialism. More recently the history of Aceh has been intertwined with the fight for autonomy, otherwise identified as insurrection, depending on which side is telling the story. Even more recently, Aceh became world famous because of the tsunami that focused its destruction on Aceh's shores. All of these elements are significant, having shaped not only the people but also Aceh itself. This location and its people are the context for this particular project; therefore, Aceh's general makeup, the history of the conflict, and the story of the tsunami are all necessary background topics.

Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam, hereafter referred to as Aceh, is the northernmost state on the Indonesian island of Sumatra (see Plate 1.1). As of a 2005 census, Aceh's population is 4,031,589. Just over 50%, or 2,025,826, of its inhabitants are female. The highest concentration of the population is located in five of the twenty-one districts. These districts—Aceh Utara, Pidie, Bireun, Aceh Timur, and Aceh Besar—are located along the eastern coast and contain 47.7% of the overall population (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2005, p. 17).

According to Reid (2006b), 80% of Aceh's population is ethnically Acehnese. Being Acehnese, however, is primarily associated with language and

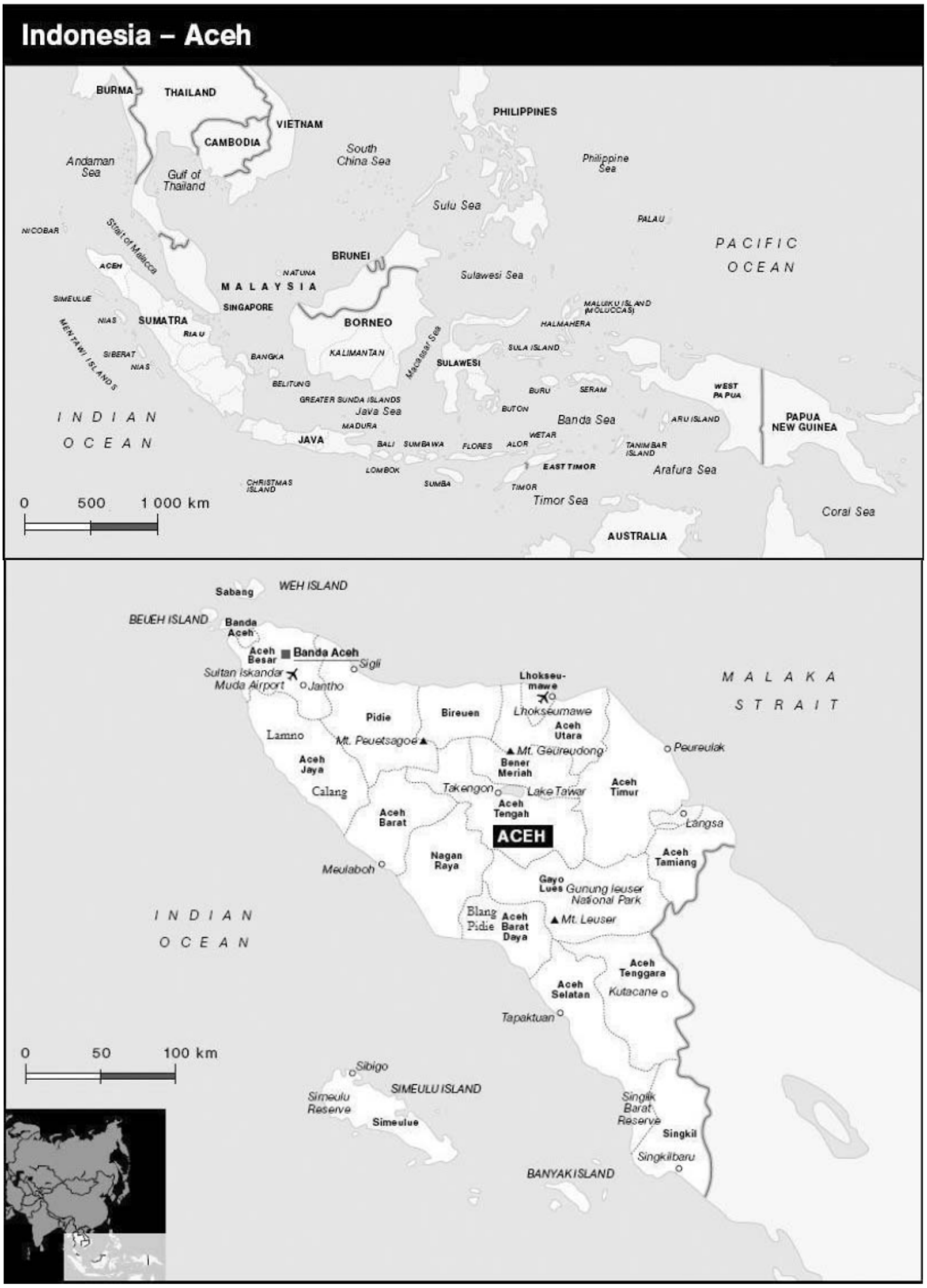
Indonesia – Aceh
BURMA
THAILAND
VIETNAM
CAMBODIA
PHILIPPINES
Andaman Sea
Gulf of Thailand
South China Sea
Philippine Sea
Sulu Sea
PALAU
PACIFIC OCEAN
NICOBAR
Strait of Malacca
ACEH
BRUNEI
NATUNA
MALAYSIA
Sulawesi Sea
SIMEULUE
SINGAPORE
MALUKU ISLAND (MOLUCCAS)
HALMAHERA
NIAS
SUMATRA
RIAU
BORNEO
MENTAWAI ISLANDS
SIBERAT
NIAS
BANGKA
KALIMANTAN
Macassar Sea
SULA ISLAND
SULAWESI
BELITUNG
BURU
SERAM
WEST PAPUA
GREATER SUNDA ISLANDS
Java Sea
BUTON
INDIAN OCEAN
MADURA
Banda Sea
ARU ISLAND
PAPUA NEW GUINEA
JAVA
BALI
SUMBAWA
FLORES
ALOR
WETAR
TANIMBAR ISLAND
LOMBOK
EAST TIMOR
Arafura Sea
CHRISTMAS ISLAND
SUMBA
TIMOR
0
500
1 000 km
Timor Sea
Coral Sea
AUSTRALIA
Sabang
WEH ISLAND
BEUEH ISLAND
Banda Aceh
Aceh Besar
Banda Aceh
Sigli
Sultan Iskandar Muda Airport
Jantho
Lhokseumawe
MALAKA STRAIT
Pidie
Bireuen
Lhokseumawe
Aceh Utara
Lamno
Mt. Peuetsagoe
Mt. Geureudong
Peureulak
Aceh Jaya
Bener Meriah
Aceh Timur
Calang
Takengon
Lake Tawar
Aceh Tengah
Langsa
Aceh Barat
ACEH
Aceh Tamiang
Meulaboh
Nagan Raya
Gayo Lues
Gunung leuser National Park
INDIAN OCEAN
Blang Pidie
Aceh Barat Daya
Mt. Leuser
Aceh Tenggara
Aceh Selatan
Kutacane
Tapaktuan
0
50
100 km
Sibigo
SIMEULU ISLAND
Simeulu Reserve
Simeulue
Singkil Barat Reserve
Singkil
Singkilbaru
BANYAK ISLAND

Figure 1.1: Map of Indonesia and Aceh (Eye on Aceh, 2006)

shared history, as the people are physically diverse. This diversity results from an ethnic combination of Austronesians, immigrants from southern India, as well as the Arab world and Turkey. Besides the Acehnese, an additional 7% of Aceh's population is ethnically Javanese, and a further 5% is an indigenous minority, the Gayo people. The national language is the Indonesian language, largely based on the *lingua franca* of the region, which predates the state of Indonesia considerably. Acehnese people speak Acehnese, a Malayo-Polynesian language, with various dialects, varying by location within Aceh. The Gayo people also have their own language, which resembles Karo-Batak (Reid, 2006b).

According to a report by the United Nations Office of Recovery Coordinator (2007), about 77% of Aceh's population currently lives in rural areas. In addition, about 50% live under the poverty line, which is only set at 180,000 Indonesian Rupiah per month. In terms of occupation, 57% of the population works in agriculture, and an additional 14% in trade. The vast majority of Acehnese are literate, and almost 98% of elementary schoolchildren are enrolled in school. The area is prone to malaria and dengue fever, and only 50% of the population has been given common immunizations (United Nations Office of Recovery Coordinator, 2007).

Although Aceh has been the subject of a limited amount of research (Reid, 2006b), some information about its traditional social structure is available. According to Siegel (1969), "Atjeh was not a society bifurcated into Islamic and customary elements, but one divided into four groups—*uleebelang* [traditional chieftain], *ulama* [religious scholar], peasants, and the sultan and his group—each of which has its own view of the nature of Islam and *adat* [custom]" (p. 11). The role of the chieftains largely tied into export and trade, while the sultans' power relied on their control of trade. Entrance into both of these social groups primarily followed blood lines. Religious scholars were the exception, as they could leave behind their status by studying at religious schools. These four groups “existed side by side not because of an overriding conception of a whole, but because the real connections between them were minimal” (Siegel, 1969, p. 253).

Class distinctions continue to divide Acehnese society. Particularly among women, Siapno (2002) describes that, “class differences were especially evident and immediately noticeable in term of demeanor, entitlement to speak and to take up space, clothes markers and sartorial style of dress” (p. 170). These class differences are particularly obvious between those with access to oil revenue and those without. Similarly, there are significant distinctions in the society between the rural and urban populations. For example, access to education, media, and the press is more common for the urban population than the rural. As a result, political influences and religious understandings vary significantly between the two groups.   (Siapno, 2002).

In addition, Siapno (2002) analyzes gender issues in Aceh. She points out the striking fact that during the seventeenth century, Aceh was ruled by a succession of four females. Likewise, a variety of Acehnese women are celebrated as heroines for the noteworthy roles they played in the fight against colonialism. Overall, Siapno (2002) argues that Acehnese society is fairly egalitarian. Females traditionally have priority in inheritance rights, and polygamy is frowned upon. Women often own the land, homes, and even many rice fields. According to Tanner (1974), “The women stay in the village, control the subsistence economy, and manage their households. …[They] are respected in the village at large, and take care of most family affairs” (p. 139). The traditional role of men in the family, on the other hand, is more peripheral. They bring financial contributions, but often act like guests in the home, only occasionally returning to their families (Siegel, 1969).

1.1 Historical Overview

Aceh and its population cannot be well understood without a grasp of its religion and the historical significance it plays in Acehnese identity. In fact, very little is known about Aceh before Sultan Ali Mughayat Syah (d. 1530), who is said to have been the first of Aceh’s rulers and the first to accept and enforce Islam (Reid, 2006b). Since the 1500s, Islam has been an important part of the history of Aceh. Particularly during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Aceh utilized and adapted Islamic concepts and systems from India and the Arab world, even passing them along to other parts of South-East Asia. Islamic law became central under Sultan Iskandar Muda (d. 1636) and Islamic literature and religious schools developed, even as many mosques were built. Aceh developed a reputation for Islamic scholarship, and as its wealth and prominence increased, Aceh became known as the verandah of Mecca (Riddell, 2006).

It was more than just religion, however, that caused Aceh to become the verandah of Mecca. In fact, Aceh’s military conquests began at least in the 1520s, as the Sultan began to attack surrounding cities in Sumatra. Within the next 100 years, Aceh attacked Melaka, Perak, and Johor on the Malay Peninsula, creating an empire and vassals of its own (Riddell, 2006). For the next two and a half centuries, Aceh held its own financially and territorially. It was one of the two most important ports in Southeast Asia, and it produced some of the most sought after resources in the world. During this time, it coexisted with European, Indian, and Arabian powers, and even signed a treaty with the East India Company in 1819 (Hing, 2006). Eventually, however, Acehnese sultans would encounter colonialism, which would lead to the downfall of this golden age of Acehnese history.

The significance of European influence in Aceh is critical in understanding the conflict that has shaped Aceh since colonial times. More specifically, a difference in opinion exists about whether or not Aceh was ever under Dutch authority. According to Askandar (2005), the Anglo-Dutch treaty was signed in 1824, assigning all of Sumatra, including Aceh, to Dutch rule. Reid (2006a), however, points out that as its name indicates, this was a treaty between the British and Dutch, excluding signatures of the Acehnese. In addition, five years earlier, the Britain-Aceh treaty promised British support to the Acehnese Sultan. In essence, these two treaties could not co-exist, which meant that a secret exchange of notes was necessary. Finally, in 1871, the British agreed to abandon its protection of Aceh, and Aceh unsuccessfully sought other allies (Reid, 2006a).

In 1873, the Dutch invaded Aceh, which turned into a bitter and drawn-out war. Aspinall (2005) argues that over the next thirty years, Aceh became the setting for the bloodiest of all Dutch expansion efforts in Southeast Asia. According to Alfian (2006), this war against the Dutch took on religious undertones, becoming known as the “Infidel War.” Acehnese poetic tales promised that, “those who participate in the Holy War will undoubtedly be granted rewards” (p. 111). These rewards include the forgiveness of sins, protection from “doomsday,” and “bliss” in the afterlife (Alfian, 2006, pp. 111-112).

In the early 1940s, Japan invaded Southeast Asia. At the beginning of this time period, it was the Acehnese, not the Japanese that drove the Dutch from Aceh. By 1945, Japanese power faded again, and Dutch influence returned to Indonesia (Reid, 2006a). According to Aspinall (2005), Aceh was the only part of Indonesia that the Dutch never attempted to re-enter. Moreover, Reid (2006a) argues that Aceh became a sort of token for Indonesian independence during the last years of Dutch influence. It went through its own social revolution and developed its own leadership and thinking, giving it the ability to contribute to the Indonesian effort for independence (Reid, 2006a).

When Indonesia achieved its independence in 1949, the fighting in Aceh did not reach its end. On the contrary, as soon as 1953, the *Darul Islam*, or Abode of Islam, revolt began. The Abode of Islam revolt was an Acehnese resistance towards the central government of Indonesia (Aspinall, 2005). According to Sulaiman (2006), one of the events that sparked the revolt was Aceh’s loss of provincial status in 1951, which made it dependent on the city of Medan and caused significant economic implications. This loss of status sent many of the religious schools and the Shariah Court into financial disorder. At the same time, many traditional chieftains were trying to take back their rice fields and plantations that had been confiscated in an earlier conflict with the militia (Sulaiman, 2006).

As these events escalated and became politicized, leaders began to see the *Darul Islam* revolt as a holy war. After all, the central government of Indonesia had failed to implement Islamic law. For the most part, the *Darul Islam* revolt utilized guerrilla insurgency, focused against the Indonesian army. It lasted for about ten years, resulting in Aceh being granted the status of a special territory. Officially, it was given the right to monitor its own affairs in such areas as religion and education (Aspinall, 2006). In reality, however, a disillusionment was forming, only to develop into the next phase of conflict in Aceh.

In 1976, the first of three phases of *Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*, or the Free Aceh Movement began. *Gerakan Aceh Merdeka*, commonly referred to as GAM, took the next step from the *Darul Islam* revolt by seeking secession from Indonesia at large (Sulaiman, 2006). It was formed by Hasan di Tiro, an Acehnese businessman who had been overseas representing *Darul Islam*. It began small, but grew as time passed. Its three phases included 1976 through 1979, 1989 through 1993, and 1998 through 2005 (Aspinall, 2005).

As is true of many conflict areas, multiple explanations for the secessionist movement exist. Sulaiman (2006) explains that one of the causes of the secessionist movement was the economic and political repression felt by many in Aceh. Aceh was rich in natural resources, such as gas, timber, and fertile soil, yet remained poor and subordinated. At the same time, Alfian (2006) notes that religious ideology ran strong in the movement. Aceh was Islamic, and a Holy War was necessary to keep it that way. Also, Aspinall (2005) points out that Acehnese disillusionment with Jakarta was increasing. The 1970s was when President Suharto was introducing his New Order regime, and many felt Aceh’s special territory status was infringed upon (Aspinall, 2005). In effect, secessionist leaders began to see the Indonesian government as yet another colonizer (Alfian, 2006).

Even if they were not initial motivating factors, violence and human rights abuses served to fuel the conflict. According to Aspinall (2005),

> Torture, disappearances, rape, the deliberate display of corpses and many other techniques became common. Passive sympathizers as well as active supporters of GAM were affected, and many ordinary villagers also became victims. No one knows precisely how many people were killed, most estimates are in the vicinity of one to two thousand dead. (p. 35)

According to Schulze (2006), the military's use of violence was partly a result of a difficulty in separating GAM members from other Acehnese. Moreover, violence towards civilians was common on both sides of the conflict. Within GAM itself, there was "an increasing criminalization of some of its rank and file as well as the ethnically and politically motivated targeting of civilians" (Schulze, 2006, p. 265). Overall, Aspinall concludes (2005), "Although the military…succeeded in suppressing the movement, they also stored up great resentment in Acehnese society" (p. 35).

In 2003, the President of Indonesia declared a state of emergency in Aceh, which meant that martial law was imposed. According to Jemadu (2006), martial law meant the Indonesian military had full responsibility to end the conflict using whatever means necessary. At the same time, the President authorized the martial authority to ban all foreigners and domestic and international NGOs from Aceh. As a result, the violation of human rights and the wrongdoings of soldiers occurred repeatedly during this period (Jemadu, 2006). Despite—and potentially partly as a result of—the free reign of the military, the conflict failed to end.

This history of conflict was the setting for the earthquake and tsunami that would forever leave an imprint on Aceh. The state was in largely in shambles, destroyed from decades, if not centuries, of war. Especially after nearly two years of martial law, "[A]ll of Aceh was inundated and terrorised" (Nessen, 2006, p. 194). The local government and legal system were severely crippled, and over 600 schools had been burnt down. Over 16,000 children were orphaned and twelve mass graves were left behind. 7,000 documented cases of human rights violations were documented, and many lived in terror (Schulze, 2006). Then, on 26 December 2004, the tsunami struck Aceh.

The tsunami caused immediate changes in the conflict. Both GAM and the Indonesian military had huge losses of life. GAM called for a cease-fire to enable the overwhelming task of collecting corpses. At the same time, the central government lifted its ban on foreigners, so that aid could be brought into the region. Also, the Indonesian military began working on aid distribution, in addition to their operations against GAM. Even though both parties returned to security operations, GAM and the Indonesian government began peace talks in Helsinki, Finland during the early months of 2005 (Miller, 2006).

Finally on 15 August 2005, GAM and the government of Indonesia signed a peace agreement. Both sides gave concessions to the other side, which meant that GAM gave up the quest for an independent Aceh. The Government of Indonesia, on the other hand, granted amnesty to former GAM members, agreed to pull out many of its military forces, and gave Aceh a greater percentage of the proceeds from its natural resources ("Memorandum," 2005).

From my experience in Aceh, the peace process appears to be progressing. No major confrontations have occurred, and effort has been made to include former GAM members into mainstream society. Currently, NGOs, United Nations (UN) agencies, and donors are beginning to focus on development among conflict victims, and a new governor was successfully elected and inaugurated in Aceh. Some concern exists, however, relating to the stability of Aceh after the reconstruction process ends.

1.2 The Tsunami

With that brief understanding of the history of Aceh and its conflict, it is important to fill out the events of the tsunami, its repercussions, and the relief effort that followed. Just 150 miles off the coast of Aceh, the Andaman-Sumatran subduction zone lies under the Indian Ocean. This subduction zone is the contact point of two tectonic plates, as one is forced under the other. Stresses that had been building up for some 100 years finally buckled on 26 December 2004. The earthquake lasted for an unheard of eight minutes, reaching a magnitude of 9.3 on the Richter scale (Lambourne, 2005).

At the epicenter of the earthquake, the ocean floor was pushed up sixty-five feet. Soon, a series of enormous waves spread through the region, first hitting the coast of Aceh thirty minutes after the earthquake. Initially, the sea water retracted, soon to return in the form of a tsunami. Upon collision, some waves reached a height of sixty-five feet, and traveled inland as far as one-half mile (Lambourne, 2005). Everything in the pathway, including people, buildings, and vegetation was destroyed or strewn about. What was out at sea, including billions of tons of water, sand, and even barges, were forced onto shore. Entire villages were wiped away, as some 130,000 were confirmed dead in Indonesia. 37,000 more were missing, and 500,000 were displaced (Body of Rehabilitation and Reconstruction and Partners, 2006).

As the tsunami moved on toward Thailand, the Maldives, Sri Lanka, India, and eventually even Kenya, Aceh was left in shambles. Its coastline was reshaped and its communications systems were down. Instantly, over 125,000 houses were needed, over 2,000 schools were damaged or destroyed, and nearly half of Aceh’s agricultural land was damaged (United Nations Office of Recovery Coordinator, 2007). Moreover, emergency medical supplies, clean water, and food were vital for those who survived the tsunami. Those who had been injured needed medical care, but eight hospitals and over 100 health care facilities were damaged (Eye on Aceh, 2006). The dead bodies needed to be collected and buried to stop the spread of disease.

According to my observations and the stories I heard, the emotional toll of the tsunami was completely overwhelming. Families were grief stricken at the loss of so many they loved, and a certain numbness lingered because of the magnitude of what had just happened. Others were searching for those they hoped would still be alive. It seemed many had been affected in one way or another, especially in the villages along the coast.

1.3 Humanitarian Response

On the evening of 26 December 2004, the President of Indonesia declared a national disaster, initializing emergency search and rescue, food, shelter, and medical help. Some 15,000 troops already in Aceh were assigned to the relief operation, and 12,000 more were later sent in. Volunteers from across Indonesia flocked to Aceh to assist with relief. On the 28th, Aceh was opened to outsiders, and help from across the world moved into Aceh. International NGOs, relief teams from foreign governments, and foreign militaries all joined in the efforts. The health services, temporary shelter, and clean water went far in minimizing additional loss of life and disease (Eye on Aceh, 2006).

Soon after the tsunami, funding began flowing into Aceh as well. The European Union, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and many governments made commitments for funds and debt moratoriums. Moreover, private contributions through NGOs and Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies were unprecedented. So much money was given that some organizations, such as Red Cross organizations and the United Kingdom Disasters Emergency Committee, stopped accepting donations. (Eye on Aceh, 2006). Ultimately, more than USD 7 billion was promised for Indonesia (Body of Rehabilitation and Reconstruction and Partners, 2006).

The work soon got underway, as bodies were taken care of and debris cleared. At the same time, tents, clean water, and medical services were provided. The people of Aceh started to pick up and start again, and many organizations started cash-for-work programs to jumpstart the economy. As relief moved towards reconstruction, projects began in a wide array of sectors. Many focused on the overwhelming task of building houses, and some worked to rebuild infrastructure. Others continued focused on the health sector or started to address education or livelihoods (Mangkusubroto, 2005).

The organizations responsible for these projects come from a wide range of backgrounds. Some are bilateral donors, active all over the world. Others are United Nations organizations, responding to the disaster or expanding their work in Indonesia to include Aceh. Many are NGOs, ranging from huge international humanitarian organizations to local NGOs. In addition, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and many of its member societies are involved (Mangkusubroto, 2005).

According to interviews with government staff, the government of Indonesia has also played a central role in the relief and reconstruction efforts. In April 2005, the President of Indonesia decreed a new, temporary government body to manage the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Aceh and Nias, an island off the coast of Sumatra that was hit by an earthquake in 2005. This body was named *Badan Rehabilitasi dan Rekonstruksi NAD-Nias* (BRR), or Agency for the Rehabilitation and Reconstruction of Aceh-Nias. It was given a large mandate: to oversee and coordinate the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Aceh and Nias. Later, BRR also became an implementing agency, completing projects in addition to its initial responsibilities. BRR became the agency responsible for all on-budget funds, which includes any monies given through or from the central government of Indonesia.

BRR was designed as a temporary agency, meaning that its responsibilities will be handed over to permanent structures of government in Aceh. [2]

These combined efforts have accomplished much over the course of two years. Over 50,000 houses have been built, over 1,000 kilometers of roads have been built, and 504 schools have been rebuilt or rehabilitated. Nearly 34% of the damaged mangroves have been restored, and 45% of the population has access to an improved water source. In addition, 66% of the agricultural land has been rehabilitated, and over 43,000 micro loans have been distributed (United Nations Office of Recovery Coordinator, 2007).

From my perspective, however, there is still a long way to go, both in the amount of assistance needed and the way assistance is given. Respondents described the huge obstacles that have arisen during the relief and reconstruction phases in Aceh (see chapter four). For example, the reconstruction process has encountered land title issues, bureaucratic delays, and inflation. Potentially, as Aceh moves into long-term development, issues of how projects are designed, who makes decisions, accountability, and coordination only become more central. That final issue—coordination—will be the focus of the rest of this project, to be unpacked and explored in the upcoming chapters. It is essential, however, to understand coordination in its context, particularly the conflict and tsunami that have shaped Acehnese history.

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[2] Information regarding BRR comes from interviews with BRR staff 27 November 2006, 26 April 2007, 1 May 2007, and 7 May 2007. Respondents were male and Indonesian.