



# Exchange of Experiences for the Future: Japanese and Turkish Humanitarian Aid and Support Activities in Conflict Zones

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Edited by  
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Ankara, 2018



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# RELIEF WORKS AND CHALLENGES: OBSERVATIONS AND PRACTICAL APPROACHES IN THE ACEH CASE

Mehmet ÖZAY\*

## 1. Introduction

Aceh, a province of the Republic of Indonesia, is remembered as the most devastated region during the earthquake and tsunami that occurred on December 24, 2004. This region witnessed not only the greatest casualties, in both tangible and intangible forms, but also the most relief work in an area covering almost 800 km. coastal region (Masyrafah; McKeon 2008, 1; Athukorala 2012).<sup>1</sup>

As mentioned in various reports and also based on the writer's own witnessing, hundreds of national and international relief organizations took part in the reconstruction and rehabilitation process in Aceh and some of them continued their work over a relatively longer period. The extension of aid organizations was based on the planning and guidance of the national reconstruction and rehabilitation agency (*Badan Rehabilitasi dan Rekonstruksi-BRR*) for various projects in the region. The disaster not only caused a huge number of human casualties, but also had a "pronounced effect" on the socio-economic activities in major cities of the province.<sup>2</sup>

The article is arranged basically in two major sections. The main purpose of this paper is to provide some reflections of the relief work process conducted by some relevant Turkish agencies during the post-tsunami phase in Aceh pertaining to relief work and reconstruction, in

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<sup>1</sup> "Economic and Social Conditions in Aceh". p. 5.  
<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTINDONESIA/Resources/226271-1168333550999/APEAfinal-3.pdf>. (Retrieved, on 14 March 2018).

<sup>2</sup> *Aceh and Nias: Two Years After the Tsunami*, 2006 Progress Report, BRR and Partners, December, p. 7, 10. (Retrieved, on 4 February 2018).

particular.<sup>3</sup> I would like to take up and explore some issues alongside personal observation of relief works carried out in a few areas exposed to natural disasters. Besides that, my personal encounters with individuals within various sectors of Acehnese society were no doubt significant opportunities for me to transmit their unheard opinions to some or larger extent. And what makes this paper is more relevant even after years of the tsunami is that negative perception of the Acehnese society towards the overall socio-economic development in the province has been pervasive.

This will be followed briefly with how national (Indonesian government) and some international agencies, such as the UN and ASEAN, attempted to reorganize the disaster management process on the basis of lessons taken from the Aceh example. Then there will be a discussion of the institutionalization attempts of disaster management, in particular by ASEAN which, though initiated in the early decades of its establishment, was stimulated to act accordingly after the experiences of various disasters, in particular the tsunami recovery process in Aceh in 2004.

It is asserted that the analytical approach to relief work efforts will have some constructive impacts on this sector. No doubt that the idea of restructuring relief works conducted in any disasters at the initial stage and sustainable developmental projects during later stages is still relevant. Since learning lessons from the previous disaster management conditions are not satisfying (Athukorala 2012), it is hoped that this initial paper would contribute to ideas of improvement of relevant relief agencies' capacities to reach an optimum goal in their works. It is also aimed to augment the literature for the benefit of stakeholders playing enormous roles in this field.

## **2. Disasters and Relief Work**

Disasters, either emerging naturally or happening as consequences of intended and/or unintended actions of human beings, cause drastic changes in nature and human life. In particular, natural disasters have drastic consequences on the poor or most vulnerable sectors of societies in less developed or developing countries and regions (Jensen 2010, xi).

Amongst others, it can be asserted here that the most deadly natural disasters are tsunamis, typhoons, cyclones, and earthquakes that periodically appear in the Asia-Pacific region. All these sorts of natural disasters make the Asia-Pacific region the most natural disaster-prone region in the world

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<sup>3</sup> Mehmet Özey. (2005). "Tsunami acısı dinmedi". *Yenişafak Gazetesi*, 25 Aralık 2005. <https://www.yenisafak.com/arsiv/2005/aramlik/25/d02.html>.

(Jha; Stanton-Geddes 2013, 13-4).<sup>4</sup> Among the countries in this region, Indonesia has, no doubt, a uniquely high vulnerability since it is in the junction of three continents (Bildan 2003, 27-8).

On the other hand, disasters caused by human negligence or intent such as explosions, wars, forest fires, and even floods as witnessed in the region similarly affect the lives of human beings and natural environment (Chan 2012, 503).<sup>5</sup> Although there are some disputes globally upon whether floods and famines are natural or human made,<sup>6</sup> there can be no doubt that they also have considerable impact on the environment and human life.

Tackling such types of disasters is very significant and these processes must be taken into consideration with effective approaches by relief organizations. In addition, the number of people who live in disaster-prone areas has increased to almost one third of the world population. What makes this issue more important is the increase in the number of disasters in the recent decades. As mentioned by some experts, there has been a total of over 1200 ‘reported disasters’ since the 1970s until the mid 2000s (Fisher 2007, 115).

The emergence of vulnerability is clearly observed in both human and physical environments. Hence, no doubt, “grave consequences” are very relevant for the poor who are lack of any significant economic support, instead bound totally their own basic livelihoods as observed in similar geographies.<sup>7</sup> Life casualties during these situations, such as destruction of residential housing areas and other various infrastructures, necessitate relief works in order to rehabilitate human and social life and reconstruct the material environment.

The phenomenon of relief or aid works to vulnerable people is the product of a feeling of solidarity that emerges during expected and unexpected natural and man-made disasters. Relief work, conducted in the very initial stage just after the disaster, is crucial because of the urgency of the situation. While the efforts during this phase nevertheless play a primary

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<sup>4</sup> “Foreword”, *ASEAN Vision 2025 on Disaster Management*, p. 1. (Retrieved, on 29 January 2018).

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.disaster-survival-resources.com/man-made-disasters.html>. (Retrieved, on 28 January 2018).

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/the-world-s-worst-natural-disasters-1.743208>. (Retrieved, on 28 January 2018).

<sup>7</sup> “Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters”, p. 1. “[www.unisdr.org/wcdr](http://www.unisdr.org/wcdr)”. (Retrieved, on 11 February 2018).

role to save people's lives in particular, the later stages of re-construction of tangible and intangible aspects of a society exposed to disaster should be taken into consideration.

Though national and international relief organizations put considerable efforts into practice in order to recover the relevant society by targeting to "build back better" and help the latter return to its normal life, they encounter various challenges during preparation and implementation of their relevant projects in the field. These challenges can be classified as tangible and intangible aspects (Athukorala 2012).<sup>8</sup>

In this regard, relief organizations have particular priorities and direct their efforts so as to reach the victims, who are physically affected by the disaster, to supply their biological needs and demands such as food and nutrition, water and sanitation, shelter etc. which lead them to be able to continue their accustomed daily life in the relatively short term. This initial stage has a function, to a certain degree, to prepare the victims for their daily routine activities without bound to much external assistance. On the other hand, as mentioned in various reports by international bodies and academic papers, the economic recovery process is also crucial, in particular, for societies which are experiencing poor economic development, armed conflicts etc. (Jensen 2010, xi).

### 3. From Emergency Aid to Developmental Issues

Turkish agencies reached Aceh province, among other relief agencies, in the earlier stage of the tsunami disaster. The agencies initiated their field works once observation and evaluation processes, and having contacts with some institutions had been conducted. Thus, Turkish relief organizations focused on distribution of emergency aid kits including food, cleaning and hygiene materials, etc., which are also named as the prime needs, to the displacement camps (Athukorala 2012). The organizations then commenced building semi-permanent accommodation in various sub-districts of the province, such as Aceh Besar, Lamno in western coast, and participated in removing and cleaning debris in Banda Aceh, the capital city. These efforts seemed to be fundamentally necessary given the nature of the initial stage of the disaster.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> "Economic and Social Conditions in Aceh". p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> Mehmet Özay. (2009). "Tsunami kurbanları anılıyor", *Timeturk*, 26.12.2009. <https://www.timeturk.com/tr/2009/12/26/tsunami-kurbanlari-aniliyor.html>;  
Mike Corder. (2005). "Tsunami survivors thankful for aid", 10 April. <http://articles.latimes.com/2005/apr/10/news/adfg-aid10> (Retrieved, on 11 February 2018);

Here I should emphasize the “Bitai phenomenon” because of the housing project near the city center of the capital city. Kampung Bitai (*Bait al-Makdis*), known as the “Turkish village” (Djajadiningrat 1934, 202), almost two kilometers from the historical mosque of Baiturrahman, was rebuilt by the Turkish Red Crescent from zero ground following the decisive order of R. T. Erdoğan, then Prime Minister of Turkey, during his visit Banda Aceh in February 2005.<sup>10</sup> I call it a “phenomenon” because it was appreciated by the Acehnese, from village people to the local governor, due to it being regarded as one of the highest quality housing projects. And it was a crucial step since “the quality of reconstruction is also considered to be generally consistent with the build back better norm” (Athukorala 2012).

On the other hand, not only the basic infrastructure projects but also developmental projects, by which I mean “community empowerment projects”, though initiated to some extent, are observed to have been left behind in this process.<sup>11</sup> As observed in a larger coastal area, including the regions Banda Aceh, Aceh Besar, and West Aceh, survivors of the households did not have any significant access mechanism to sustainable financial services. And though the overall economic loss in the province caused by the tsunami was around 4.5 billion US Dollars, and the loss of productive sectors such as fisheries, farming and manufacturing 1.2 billion US Dollars, it is difficult to find out an exact figure about economic loss of the households pertaining to their sustainable production system (Athukorala 2012).<sup>12</sup>

The residents of this region lost not only their houses and but also their basic means of economic production, such as agricultural and gardening fields, animal husbandry, fishing boats etc. which meant fundamental economic subsistence mechanisms. Beyond this, the tsunami caused enormous damage to the soil, river basins, and generally all coastal areas that were definitely of fundamental importance for the people’s economic activity. Though it is argued that the some institutions enhanced economic recovery programs, there were significant weaknesses and dysfunctions even years after the tsunami (Masyrafah; McKeon 2008, 3).

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Annual Report, 2006, “Turkey”, 4 May, p. 4. <http://www.ifrc.org/docs/appeals/annual05/05AA070annual.pdf>. (Retrieved, on 11 February 2018).

<sup>10</sup> “Başbakan Erdoğan felâket bölgesinde”, 06.02.2005, *Hürriyet*. <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/basbakan-erdogan-felaket-bolgesinde-294516>. (Retrieved, on 14 March 2018).

<sup>11</sup> Mehmet Özay. (2015). “Açe’de kına yakmak veya Açe’ye kına yakmak”.

<http://guneydoguasyacalismalari.blogspot.com.tr/search?q=tsunami>

<sup>12</sup> “Economic and Social Conditions in Aceh”. p. 5.

But the issue of developmental projects cannot be underestimated in the emergency aid process. These projects are regarded to be relevant with providing economic recovery as well. Instead, both emergency aid and economic recovery are held in a successive way in order to revive pre-disaster community life in order to lead to a betterment of the socio-economic, including cultural life, observed in the pre-disaster era. It is rightly argued that, there was a significant gap between relief operations and developmental initiatives, as mentioned for other cases as well.<sup>13</sup> And this situation was significantly observed in Aceh as well. Though there were some hope about the economic future of the province after the tsunami,<sup>14</sup> negative perception is still widespread among the Acehnese.

As it is understood in some research papers and observed first hand by the present writer, this gap is caused not by the nature of the things, but instead by focusing on first emergency aid and lacking consideration and planning for longer term developmental projects in disaster-prone regions.

In this context, the importance of developmental projects pertaining to improving the vulnerable sector to make it self-sufficient in economic production is undeniable. Self-sustainability of people in particular are significant since,

- the poor are the ones experiencing direct and longer term economic losses.
- developing countries, such as Indonesia have relatively less effective social support systems for the vulnerable sector of the society, or no support systems at all.
- completing the emergency relief work will not allow the poor to sustain their own living.
- rural areas are comparatively more prone to losses and “the vulnerability of rural livelihoods” is higher owing to the latter’s exposure to direct interaction with the environment (Jensen 2010, 14).

This is very relevant to the Indonesian context, since the peoples’ vulnerability, in particular the rural sector of the population, is higher (Bildan 2003, 28). This gap should be taken into consideration by the relevant stakeholders including regional governments and international relief organizations. To find out a practical solution to this problem, the latter

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/on-the-record/challenges-in-the-humanitarian-field-the-big-picture/>. (Retrieved, on 30 January 2018).

<sup>14</sup> “Economic and Social Conditions in Aceh”. p. 6.

should diversify their funds and collaborate with some professional bodies that are assumed to be experts in micro-credit programmes to enhance the capacity and capability of the vulnerable. As observed in the villages around Aceh Besar, adjunct region to Banda Aceh, capital city of Aceh Province, rural people involved in a variety of types of production systems including copra, coconut oil, gardening, poultry, small scale animal farming, forestry etc. These people could have been led to continue their economic activities with relatively small amounts of capital; improving their skills and approaches under basic guidance of experts. It is right to emphasize at least some key points, as follows, so as to give some understanding that is assumed to be helpful to cause this mentioned gap:

- the restrictions of aid organizations themselves in particular operational areas
- lack of knowledge and information about socio-economic realities of the disaster-prone areas
- underestimation of the potentialities of the local economic values and infrastructure
- considering the overall modernization process leads to discourage GOs and NGOs to initiate their programs.

Instead of these restrictions, the relevant agencies can merge their aid operations with developmental projects by some minor changes and upgrades to their operational mechanisms. Since, at least some aid organizations have enough capacity to collect huge resources, what they need is to divert their projections by recruiting professionals for developmental initiatives on the basis of the realities of local communities.

As an alternative, aid organizations should try to find alternative ways to be able to collaborate with developmental agencies either from the same country or the others which have some common understanding, vision and mission, from the early stages of their operations. In particular, the planning stages could be beneficial to save material and human resources and accordingly lead the adaptation of the people into a new developmental environment.

The benefits of this merging the power and facilities of two organizations operating in distinct areas will be as follow:

- saving material and human resources,
- using time accordingly for the recovery of the victims in a short period,

- initiating programs with the active participation of the local individuals, cooperation etc.
- considering the local experiences and values for facilitating all exist.

In regard to this, relief organizations need to adopt a new collaborative and innovative approach with local institutions to enhance socio-economic conditions of the disaster-resilient region (Athukorala 2012).

NGOs can collaborate with some other key stakeholders such as construction, farming, planting, fishery, and forestry companies just after the former have completed their emergency aid programs for the needy people. This collaboration is assumed to facilitate the direct involvement of the mentioned companies by the guidance of NGOs that possess practical approaches, knowledge, and communication mechanisms needed for reaching the vulnerable sector of the society.

The importance of this issue is based on the size of destruction of livelihoods in disaster areas, as observed in Aceh in 2004. The reports published by the relevant agencies remind us why the relief organizations should focus on improving livelihood programs.<sup>15</sup>

#### **4. Humanitarian Act: Responsibilities and Facts for Sustainability**

Relief work, as observed in both national and global levels, is conducted by various institutions. These institutions, classified under the concept of governmental, semi-governmental, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), respond in emergency situations and conduct a very crucial task as observed during the disasters that have appeared worldwide. Among the institutions participating in field work are agencies in UN body, Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, government agencies of individual states such as AFAD (Disaster Emergency Management Authority), JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency), Ausaid (Australian Aid), Indonesian Agency for Disaster Management (BNPB), even “militaries and private companies, and private individuals” operate in relief works (Fisher 2007, 115).

In the history of relief assistance, it is seen that there have been some attempts to organize global relief efforts. For instance, there was a charter

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<sup>15</sup> *Aceh and Nias: Two Years After the Tsunami*, 2006 Progress Report, BRR and Partners, December, p. 15. (Retrieved, on 4 February 20). (Note: The earthquake and tsunami caused 100,000 small business persons lost their livelihoods; 4,717 coastal fishing boats lost; more than 20,000 ha fish ponds destroyed; 60,000 farmers displaced; more than 70,000 ha agricultural land damaged. *See for details: ibid.*)

titled International Relief Union agreed upon by the member countries of the League of Nations in 1927. Hence, the global political situation, and later on World War Two, created obstacles. Another stage was seen during the 1980s (Fisher 2007, 117). One of the latest efforts was conducted just after the months of the tsunami in Aceh, which is mentioned above referring to the Hyogo Framework of Action (Jensen 2010, 15).<sup>16</sup>

With regard to this, the collaboration of these agencies with each other and their close relationships with the host-country cannot be underestimated to materialize a higher level of satisfying efforts in disaster-prone areas. It is expected that the relevant agencies are to harmonize their roles and responsibilities in order to achieve successful disaster risk management (Jensen 2010, xii; Athukorala 2012). The main purpose of all these activities of the regional and global agencies is to find more feasible and economic approaches to make the civil/private and state organizations more effective in the field. Besides these semi-governmental organizations, private relief organizations might attempt to merge in the form of larger partnerships that can have crucial impact and reflections in regional based field works.

The need for having a common and mutual understanding among international relief agencies is crucial to conduct their works in a collaborative and supportive manner in the field. In fact, having an agreement among the agencies is not surprising; instead, it is a compulsory process emerging alongside with the experiences of disasters. For instance, the earthquake and tsunami in December of 2004 became a learning process for relief organizations and the local and national governments in various regions (Syamsidik et al. 2017, 3).<sup>17</sup>

In this regard, ASEAN, NATO, and UN, in various levels of talks, discussed for a betterment of legal issues, procedures and practices in the field (Fisher 2007, 117). Besides that, the higher education institutions, for instance as observed in Aceh and in the US, initiated various degree programs under the title of “disaster management courses” (Roza 2007, 39).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> *Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters*, International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR). (Retrieved, on 4 February 2018); ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response, p. 3.  
<http://agreement.asean.org/media/download/20140119170000.pdf>.

<sup>17</sup> Making Aceh safer through Disaster Risk Reduction in Development (DRR-A), Lessons Learned: Building Awareness and Education, (2012), United Nations Development Programm and Government of Indonesia, p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> 10<sup>th</sup> Aceh International Workshop and Expo on Sustainable Tsunami Disaster Recovery (AIWEST – DR 2016), p. 1.

In this context, the Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies can form a model for active and effectual collaborations. There were some initiatives to form a unitary operation procedure as seen as follow in the form of Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations in Disaster Relief of 1994, and the Sphere Project Humanitarian and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response, which was updated in 2004. Though these attempts to determine a common and collaborated effort for the benefit of the victims in the field, it is difficult to assert that a satisfying result has been reached globally (Fisher 2007, 117).

The increasing capacity and capability of relief organizations in operations are expected to save a significant number of peoples' lives and make the latter sustainably reconnect to life again. Though these organizations provide considerable efforts into practice in order to recover the vulnerable people and help the latter prepare to return their normal life circle, there are some significant challenges during the works of NGOs in the field. These challenges can be classified as tangible and intangible aspects. Tangible areas cover all material aid processes in operations including emergency aid, distribution of food, and reconstruction of camps and housing areas and running these operations in a relatively short period of time.

On the other hand, effects of the disasters can also be observed in intangible areas such as psychologies of the people. Realization of intangible aspects takes more significant time and effort, including distinct expertise of professionals in order to revive the psycho-cultural areas. There are some significant issues that should be considered for effective field works by relief organizations. These issues should be taken into consideration in a deepening manner.

## **5. Challenges**

Here I should focus on some basic aspects of challenges with which relief agencies come across in the field.

### **5.1. Human Resources Capacity**

Relief organizations have paid positions generally for managerial staff in the headquarters in their institutions (Roza 2007, 33). Because of this reason, relief organizations or NGOs principally consider to recruit volunteers among the ones who either have special skills or do not, to assign as field workers majorly and partially for office workers in order to cut their already limited budgets and be frugal in their expenditures.

Volunteers; if we need to give a definition, they are individuals who contribute to a relevant relief work with their personal knowledge and expertise in full social responsibility without expecting any material benefit or advantage (Çakmak 2002, 88). Volunteers, -at least some of them-, are expected to work in the field, even those who come from professional sectors, and they need to adapt in various aspects to this new environment. A considerable aspect of this process is the responsibility of the NGO management to give the internal training for volunteer individuals (Çakmak 2003, 71).

It could be argued that the volunteers learn relevant skills through first hand affiliation to the real time conditions in the field. Hence, this causes obstacles in the delivery of relief work. As seen in the programs of some professional institutions, skills dealing with relief work should be disseminated through formal training settings.<sup>19</sup>

With regard to this, the individual volunteers need to be equipped with capacities and capabilities such as knowledge and information about local language, attitudes and culture, at least in a basic form, in order to tackle potential challenges. Simple miscommunication is potentially a cause of disruption in the interaction between field workers and needy people. It is beyond the satisfaction level of the latter, instead a crucial step which is function to sustain the relief work.

## **5.2. Language Barrier**

Overcoming the language barrier is a very fundamental issue that should be handled urgently in initial stages. To communicate with the people, the field workers need to have a basic form of the spoken language in the relevant society and they should have communicative skills and not disregard other aspects such as body language and so on. The language aspect also includes having some awareness of cultural values of the society.

## **5.3. Empathetic Relationships and Direct Involvement With Needy People**

Emphatic relationships of the field workers with the vulnerable sectors of the society that becomes the subject of any disasters have a larger impact on the success and sustainability of the relief work. This approach allows the field workers to perceive the real needs of the vulnerable group beyond distributing aid packages in a regular period.

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<sup>19</sup> <https://odihpn.org/magazine/preparing-humanitarian-workers-for-disaster-response-a-red-crossred-crescent-field-training-model/>. (Retrieved, on 7 February 2018).

The relief workers are expected to have extra considerations about the socio-cultural and religious identities and practices in relevant societies. For instance, as observed in Aceh, religious and cultural values could be very determinative in social life and any types of relief efforts should be affiliated with these values and practices.<sup>20</sup>

In this regard, the field workers need to be equipped and to get first-hand information about the relevant society in order to understand the difficulties and realize their targets. This process includes tangible and intangible perspectives of the relevant society including basic psycho-cultural realities and social entities.

In addition, having emphatic relations allow the relief work volunteers to engage without any psychological barriers with the locals. It is assumed that this interaction facilitates the former to draw on the local wisdom, knowledge, and capacity in order to make both sides to enhance their cooperation in maximal level in.<sup>21</sup> In the first hand, the ones who work in the field of psycho-social programs should be equipped with,

- a) Understanding of local cultural values,
- b) Considering the sensitivity of religious and ethnic minorities,
- c) Being neutral towards all socio-religious groups.

While there is prioritization in relief work, this process should be carefully planned, structured and implemented by the relevant parties by collaborating with local socio-religious leaders. Otherwise, it will cause disruptions and disturbances in the whole process of relief work.

During disasters, beyond tangible and human casualties, intangible sectors of a society such as cultural-, historical- and religious institutions that are demolished or washed away, to some or larger extent, as observed clearly in the Aceh context, should be taken into consideration significantly. Since these are the life channels of a given society that bound individuals to their society and constitute meaning for the whole sector of society. These institutions supply real support to the vulnerable people after the initial stage of relief work.

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<sup>20</sup> Making Aceh safer through Disaster Risk Reduction in Development (DRR-A), Lessons Learned: Building Awareness and Education, (2012), United Nations Development Programm and Government of Indonesia, p. 3-4.

<sup>21</sup> This is significantly referred in the UN report. *See*: p. 44. (Retrieved, on 4 February 2018).

No doubt that operating in these fields requires qualifications and expertise. In this regard, NGOs can approach native individuals and institutions to understand the core values and meanings of these institutions.

#### **5.4. Decision Making or Missing Points in Relief Work**

A decision making mechanism is no doubt a significant phenomenon that establishes the forms and regulations of relief agencies. Hence, what makes the latter more practical and adaptable in their approach is their flexibility and resilience. In this regard, these organizations are seen in the form of progressiveness in comparison to government agencies in the context of any encounters with the unintended environment such as disasters.

The decision making process, expected to flow from top-down, say, from the managerial staff, whether they have had field experience or not, to field workers might cause irregularities or disruptions of the work.

Though I do not underestimate the professionalism of the relief institutions' decision making process, I should emphasize the importance of the field workers' roles in the decision making process. My opinion is based on the field workers' acknowledgement of the cause and consequences of the real situations in the very first hand. This can be rightfully understood as the advantages of being in the field physically and engagement of the vulnerable sectors in the society. With regard to this, I should emphasize that volunteers are in expectation to be in a position to be listened to, based on their knowledge and experience and their capacity to analyze the real situation in the field and the value of data they collected in the very first hand. This situation should allow the horizontal relations, instead of hierarchic action that is mostly observed in state organizations. No doubt that this mechanism, will allow the volunteers get satisfaction and put in more effort (Çakmak 2002, 89; Çakmak 2003, 149).

Hence the realities and unexpected conditions that are observed and witnessed by the field staff should be taken into consideration by headquarters staff or senior staff. In fact, whether it is an equality matter between field staff and managerial staff or not, this is an aspect of the field's reality which is urgently needed to be considered by relevant parties.

#### **5.5. Public Relations**

In a relief work which is no doubt a human activity, there is the receiving party or requesting party, say, the vulnerable people and involved in different stages in this process act either as taker or giver. In particular,

the latter need to express themselves in front of the former. Introducing itself to the vulnerable society is a crucial stage for a relief agency. This is a process that functions to close the social gap between the parties.

With regard to this, relief organizations should disseminate information about their institutions and field works to the relevant society. This can be materialized through various ways. Though, person to person relations is very crucial for a strong communication between relief workers and the vulnerable people, publication and some other media segments should also be considered as a significant step for sustainable relief process.

Starting from the identity of the relief agency, its plans and projects for the vulnerable sector of the society and the implementation of all these in the field allow them to be known by the members of the society. For that purpose, relief agencies should have the capacity of human resources and material infrastructure in order to initiate this public relations effort. Vernacular languages should be given priority in the relevant publications that can be in the form of handouts, brochures, periodicals, power point presentations, and audio-visual media.

Dissemination of information through various media is taken for granted as a responsibility and a way to create trust among the society and in the eyes of the funding institutions. In addition, in this way, the relief institutions can establish how transparent they are in their projects. Since individuals and institution funders wish to see acknowledged how the resources have been used and how the projects have reached the target groups (Çakmak 2003, 63). It can be argued that this process allows the expansion of the successful projects into society in a larger perspective.

These written and audio-visual media help the distinct sectors of the relevant society to understand the relief work and lead them to accommodate themselves to the new environment. This process also allows the relief organizations to evaluate their works on how effectively they are perceived by the people and allows them to reposition on the basis of the needs and feedback of the relevant society.

As observed in the field, after the emergency stage, the society needed communication vehicles, such as radio. Though it is a relatively costly investment, establishing a radio station supports the society in various ways. No doubt that operating a small radio station is considerably beneficial both educate the public about the issues relevant to disaster management and to express ideas and thoughts and disseminate updated information about field

works.<sup>22</sup> Through the operation of a radio station, vulnerable people also find an opportunity to voice up their ideas about the process and explain their real needs and get informed by listening various programs. Besides, the programs which include entertaining activities such as music programs, expert talks, drama, and storytelling have an impact as psychological support for various age groups.

### **5.6. Overlapping of Relief Work**

Overlapping of relief work is considered a significant problem since it causes not only material waste but also confusion among the vulnerable people. It can be argued that at least one of the reasons of this situation is caused by weaknesses during the planning stage such as “the lack of coordination” (Athukorala 2012). In this regard, general statistical data about the geography, climate and human population, and people’s culture, which include the significant logistic centers, roads and ports, maps of housing areas, number of households etc., are needed much in the very first hand. In addition, the management of this data is also another issue to be taken into consideration by professional individuals and organizations to coordinate all the efforts.

Without considerable preparations and organizations in pre-relief work, the aid organizations either unintentionally overlap their efforts, or the items directed to the victims are just considered as waste since these are improper for the people’s consumption and use.

Hence, there are some obstacles and challenges to realize this fundamental process. For instance, some relief organizations prefer not to collaborate with the central organization or to follow its direction and guidance due to the latter’s slow-speed mechanism. Another excuse that is commonly expressed is that of relief agencies’ responsibilities to their donors. They have to prove how they reach the vulnerable in the field, for their satisfaction of how the aid task carried out by supplying feedback in the form of financial report and visual materials to their donors or general public (Athukorala 2012).

No doubt that this is a very practical approach of relief agencies in order to guarantee, to lesser or larger extent, their fund resources or to increase the portion of them for future tasks to be pursued. In addition, building a success

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<sup>22</sup> Making Aceh safer through Disaster Risk Reduction in Development (DRR-A), Lessons Learned: Building Awareness and Education, (2012), United Nations Development Programm and Government of Indonesia, p. 7.

story and acquiring a title of fame by reaching the vulnerable circles in a fastest way is asserted to reflect definitely positive image of the relief agency in both national and international public opinion and media.

This might be accepted as a sort of justification for the relief organizations. However, a particular focus should be given to the quality of work and sustainability of the efforts which are more crucial for the victims' recovery and rehabilitation process on the course of time. In regard to this, a consensus among the organizations taking part to reach the victims of a disaster should be manifested.

Pertaining to this, the central body of management should focus on a practical policymaking process that mobilizes according to all relevant relief organizations to reach the field at the the fastest speed possible. If these sorts of bodies, at least in potential natural disaster-prone regions, are ready by having set globally recognized policies, the leadership of the body in any real emergency cases will produce a satisfying level of practices of distribution emergency relief tasks. The responsible organizations should map out strategically their directions of action. This process will definitely contribute to the process of their institutionalization.

No doubt that the stakeholders working in the very critical stages of relief work are expected to prioritize significant communication in order to promote a higher level of cooperation among each other. Both the planning of an individual relief organization and the strengthening of the efforts between governmental and non-governmental agencies are much needed during this stage.

### **6. Responsibilities of National and Regional Governments**

The issues relevant to tasks and responsibilities of the regional and national governments cover from issuing relief workers visas and recognizing the status of the relief organizations until supplying data that undeniably causes tangible and intangible losses such as money, time, and efforts of the relief organizations.

On the other hand, it is undeniable that during the extraordinary situation caused by disaster, individuals or small groups of people can act to benefit themselves through unlawful deeds under the guise of aid work. Relief works in conflict areas, such as Aceh (until 2005), Patani (Thailand), Mindanao (The Philippines), and Rakhine State of Myanmar or some other places smaller or larger extent exposed to regional or national security problems in Asia-Pacific, come across interest clashes among the various circles including the independent movements or movements looking for

acquiring the right of an autonomous region, regional and national police and military forces, regional war-lords and political elites, etc. The relevant conflict areas are generally the places having considerable natural resources including forest products, and other illegitimate economic activities such as black market and drug businesses, weapons smuggling, etc. All these appear as disadvantages for the relief works that are in particular assumed to reach the most vulnerable sectors of the conflict societies. No doubt that these technical or bureaucratic matters reflect setbacks for field works and the vulnerable people then become the real losers.

As observed and witnessed during the relief work operations in Aceh Province of the Republic of Indonesia, the customs policies caused delays of a huge number of containers including aid materials that were assumed to reach victims on time (Fisher 2007, 116). I personally witnessed a similar situation in which a cargo full of food materials for the staff of some Turkish NGOs was prevented by the custom officers in International Polonia Airport, Medan, in one of the late months in 2005. After some longer talks and deals with the authorities through finding influential Indonesian people, the cargo was released.

On the other hand, though there had been some programs such as BAKORNAS PBA (National Coordinating Body for Natural Disaster Management) having networks and branches until the level of sub-districts, tackling with the disaster since 1979 (Bildan 2003, 28), it has been observed that the Indonesian national and state governments had to initiate various programs after the tsunami, as mentioned in some places in this article, which in this regard can be considered definitely as a learning process in national and international level. For instance, the local disaster management office initiates some regular programs such as socialization programs, at public level and in particular schools. It is understood that these national institutions have understood the paramount importance of dissemination of information of relevant issues such as risk decreasing data etc. in order to decrease community vulnerability during disasters and look for cooperation and collaborations with some other agencies at local and national levels.<sup>23</sup>

### **7. ASEAN: Initiating a Regional Response to Disasters**

After some years, alongside with other developments, ASEAN as a regional body of union has been conducting various workshops and meetings with the politicians, professionals' participation from the member states to overcome the challenges emerging during the disaster occasions. In regard to this, no doubt that the tsunami in 2004 was a triggering effect on this

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<sup>23</sup> LGSat p. 7.

preparedness in regional level as mentioned in the Asean Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) paper.<sup>24</sup> As partly seen in this article, the experience of recovery and rehabilitation acquired in Aceh became a factor for the stakeholders in ASEAN, and no doubt beyond it, to initiate various disaster management projects to tackle with similar natural disasters in the whole region.

Post-tsunami relief work triggered institutional efforts and attempts to be initiated and guided under some international institutions. It should be mentioned that these initiatives were commenced since the first anniversary of the tsunami in Aceh through an institution named ‘disaster mitigation research center’ (TMMRC) of Syiah Kuala University in Banda Aceh.<sup>25</sup> Later on, ASEAN, which is made up ten regional countries, and its relevant agencies decided to enhance their collaboration in relief and developmental projects in disaster-affected regions as programmed in the formation of AADMER, a strategic program was decided to give priority to small and medium sized enterprises, micro-insurance etc.<sup>26</sup>

It can be safely asserted that the policy makers in ASEAN have been attempting to initiate various programs, since “more than 50 percent of global disaster mortalities occurred in the ASEAN region”.<sup>27</sup> Beside that, it is observed that global perspectives were attempted to be developed by the agencies of the United Nations as seen in the form of the Hyogo Framework for Action, an international conference held in Kobe.<sup>28</sup>

It is also important to remind that the majority of ASEAN nations are considered as traditional agricultural societies, though development, modernization or industrialization have been increasingly exercised in recent decades. Hence, a significant size of the population of the ASEAN still conduct their lives in rural areas and earn their incomes through traditional production systems.

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<sup>24</sup> <http://agreement.asean.org/media/download/20140119170000.pdf>, p. 2. (Retrieved, on 29th January 2018); “Foreword”, *ASEAN Vision 2025 On Disaster Management*, p. 1, 7. (Retrieved, on 29th January 2018).

10<sup>th</sup> Aceh International Workshop and Expo on Sustainable Tsunami Disaster Recovery (AIWEST – DR 2016), p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> *ASEAN Vision 2025 On Disaster Management*, p. 2. (Retrieved, on 29th January 2018).

<sup>27</sup> *ASEAN Vision 2025 On Disaster Management*, p. 4. (Retrieved, 29th January 2018).

<sup>28</sup> This process can be observed in the world conference on Disaster Reduction held between 18 and 22 January 2005, in Kobe. See: *Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters*, International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR). (Retrieved, 4<sup>th</sup> February 2018).

Notably, this feature reminds us not only of human fatalities but also of a variety of economic activities such as agriculture, animal farming, plantation, fishery and forestry are prone to be in potential degradation in various degrees. This situation, no doubt, forces the policy makers of ASEAN to have significant preparations by reorienting their approaches and developing new perspectives in order to act holistically in close cooperation among the agencies of the member states.

We should highlight here a few aspects of limitations of the relief and developmental works in the region. In this regard, people to people interactions in ASEAN context has still to be ameliorated significantly. Though the initial stages were commenced during the talks in 2008 and reflected in ASEAN charter in the form of “three pillars”, in particular the development of ASEAN “socio-cultural community” need to be studied and waited to be implemented significantly. And this process was renewed by member states observed in the 2015 Declaration of Resilience and it was emphasized that beyond other factors socio-cultural measures are relevant to tackle with the “reduction of vulnerability to disaster”.<sup>29</sup> Since this is itself a source of problem for various organizations in the region to operate freely in a disaster prone area. In addition to this, though ASEAN wishes to be a playmaker in its own region to tackle all forms of disasters, we should figure out that the member countries do not want to be prone to global powers’ hub of emergency response.

Though there is a comprehensive cooperation such as AADMER (Petz 2014, 1),<sup>30</sup> and ASEAN Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre)<sup>31</sup>, and some affirmative accounts from the ASEAN authorities in various meetings about the successful establishment process of AHA,<sup>32</sup> it should be tested in a significant disaster case in the field how the member states act accordingly to minimize the casualties and to rehabilitate the socio-economic and cultural injuries in relevant societies. Since there is an article to foresee collaboration in improvement of disaster management capacities of member states in ASEAN Declaration agreed on 26 June 1976 (Loevy

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<sup>29</sup> *ASEAN Vision 2025 On Disaster Management*, p. 7, 8. (Retrieved, on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2018).

<sup>30</sup> “Foreword”, *ASEAN Vision 2025 On Disaster Management*, p. 1. (Retrieved, on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2018).

<sup>31</sup> Fourth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to AADMER, and Third Meeting of the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Disaster Management (AMMDM), 16 December 2015, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> Chairman’s Statement of the Third Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Respose (AADMER) and Second ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Disaster Management (AMMDM).

2016, 202),<sup>33</sup> there seems it has not much been effectively implied during the various disasters, in particular, the 2004 tsunami.

All these above-mentioned formation processes are no doubt a positive development for the peoples of ASEAN. Hence, this phenomenon needs to be handled accordingly since ASEAN hosts some corrupt socio-economic practices. Resource mobilization is deeply connected to how to corruption and create healthy economic activities for public benefit.

### **8. Conclusion**

The tsunami made Aceh a very important testing ground for relief agencies. There is no doubt that national and international relief agencies have acknowledged enough experiences to tackle with similar disaster conditions. As observed in the process, various global and regional organizations have initiated collaborative programs in order to integrate their institutional efforts.

On the other hand, though there were significant emergency relief works realized, a larger investment for infrastructure projects in coastal areas of Aceh province in post-tsunami period would be beneficial. It is doubtful the economic recovery steps alongside the local people's needs have been successfully continued.

After the initial stage of emergency, some agencies started micro-credit projects to reach the vulnerable people to revive their subsistence economic activities. Hence, I can argue that this opportunity has not been functionally used by national and international aid organizations.

Aceh is still in a vulnerable situation in the context of self-sufficiency of basic livelihood, lack of electricity and clean water supply; though surrendered by seas the fishery sector is still run by traditional methods and; Medan, the capital city of adjunct province, North Sumatra is the fundamental source of major products and materials; northern and western sea ports inactive in terms of both national and international export import activities.

All these issues force us to reconsider a need for a new approach in the task of relief organizations, in particular the vulnerability of the people in economic sustainability in the field.

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<sup>33</sup> <http://agreement.asean.org/media/download/20140119170000.pdf>, p. 2. (Retrieved, on 29th January 2018).

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