

Aid Accountability and Participatory Approaches in Post-Disaster Housing Reconstruction¹

Patrick Daly^{a)} and Caroline Brassard^{b)}

a) Visiting Senior Fellow

Asia Research Institute

National University of Singapore

b) Assistant Professor

Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy

National University of Singapore

Abstract

In the last decade, housing has become one of the most prominent and best funded sectors in large-scale post-disaster reconstruction efforts. This has especially been the case in Asian developing countries where both official and private aid helped finance a significant amount of the housing reconstruction. Despite the emphasis upon community involvement, inclusive and participatory processes for housing reconstruction by international non-governmental organizations, recent experiences show that such ideas often do not readily translate in practice on the ground.

This paper analyses the necessary conditions for successful involvement by local beneficiaries in rebuilding their homes following natural disasters. The analysis is situated within the context of community recovery, and the trade-off between centralized donor planning, and community driven initiatives, using primary and secondary data collected from post-tsunami Aceh, Indonesia. The paper also discusses how various stakeholders (including recipient government and donors) evaluate and make use of the practical capacities of affected persons and communities to be involved in planning, building and monitoring processes in the housing sector.

Our research focused on the level and types of roles played by the aid beneficiaries in the housing reconstruction process in Aceh. In spite of considerable rhetoric about participation and inclusive reconstruction accompanying the post-tsunami reconstruction by various donors, a number of systemic barriers created considerable distance between beneficiaries and NGOs in Aceh in the housing sector. The drive for efficiency and need to produce tangible results quickly, mixed with the sheer number of stakeholders and resources involved, created a largely top-down environment in which decisions were centralized, and arbitrary standards imposed. This was exacerbated by an extensive chain of sub-contractors, a large supply of lower-cost imported labor, and highlighted the importance of local political affiliations, leading to weak accountability and reduced aid effectiveness.

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Keywords

reconstruction, participation, housing, post-disaster, accountability, effectiveness

Introduction

This paper discusses aid governance, accountability and participatory approaches in the post-tsunami housing sector in Aceh, Indonesia. One of the central concerns highlighted during the needs assessments conducted immediately after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami was accountability — a frequent issue in most post-disaster reconstruction and development situations, especially in the developing world. Indonesia had a reputation for corruption and financial mismanagement, which was further exacerbated by the diminished administrative capacities in Aceh due to thirty years of conflict, high levels of poverty and the devastation of the tsunami (FAO, 2005; Reid 2006, TEC Capacity Report).² Given the sheer amounts of funding available and the limited confidence in national and local institutions for managing aid, considerable efforts were taken by the government of Indonesia to reassure international donors that the relief and reconstruction of Aceh would be accountable, equitable, and transparent (Daly *et al.* 2011). This included the unprecedented creation of the Aceh and Nias Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency (BRR), whose director reported to the Indonesian President. The BRR was charged with coordinating all post-tsunami relief and reconstruction efforts in Indonesia with a finite mandate of five years (Mardhatillah 2010).

The massive influx of resources and organizations into a situation of limited capacities, heavy damage, and pressing needs posed significant challenges for aid governance (Telford 2011), which we define as the application of good governance principles of transparency and accountability by all stakeholders (see also Brassard 2009). There has been a growing consensus in the main external evaluations of the post-tsunami reconstruction efforts that there were major problems with regards to both aid effectiveness and accountability (TEC 2006a and 2007; Masyrafah and McKeon, 2008; ACARP 2007; Fengler *et al.* 2011; etc.). While the BRR and major donors devised a financing system to ensure upwards accountability to the main sources of funding countering fears of waste and corruption, significant neglect in terms of downward accountability to beneficiaries and ownership by the beneficiaries has been reported.

² Since 1976, the Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM) or the Free Aceh Movement been involved in civil war with the Indonesian government, costing hundreds of thousands of lives and imposing extreme damage to livelihoods in Aceh (Allen *et al.*, 2002; Reid 2006; Feener *et al.* 2011).

A second major point of focus in the initial needs assessments and recovery plans was the importance of community involvement, and for relief and reconstruction efforts to be owned locally (CGI 2005; BAPPENAS 2005.). Building on commonly accepted policies within the humanitarian and development fields, placing beneficiaries and local institutions at the centre of aid efforts was seen as both a fundamental right of affected communities, as well as the best way to ensure an inclusive and effective response. It was generally accepted that aid and reconstruction efforts needed to be participatory and community driven; a goal that was not always met (Kenny 2007; 2010).

In this paper, we look at the application of good governance within the housing sector in Aceh, which was a major focal point for aid. It is well established within the literature that post-disaster housing is a complicated process, and requires a near impossible balancing act to satisfy all parties involved. It is recognized that coordinating the needs and aspirations of beneficiaries with the means and systems of donors and implementers is highly context specific, and rarely seamless (Fallahi 2007; Tas *et al.* 2007; Saunders 2004; etc.). Such concerns have begun to surface within the recent literature on post-tsunami housing reconstruction (Ruwanpura 2009; Boano 2009; Kennedy *et al.* 2008; etc.). According to the TEC (2006:93), serious problems occurred in the housing sector as a result of supply-driven approaches, inappropriate housing designs, and over-reliance on donor-driven processes. Moreover, many agencies that operated in the post-tsunami environment were new to the housing sector and lacked experience on the ground in post disaster contexts (Telford 2011). According to Christoplos (2006), this led to the poor quality of transitional housing, and a slow shift to permanent housing. Overall, the housing sector was fraught with a wide range of problems dealing with quality, quantity, location, and ownership; most of which can be related to issues of accountability.

We focus on the relationship between ‘participatory’ approaches to reconstruction and multi-directional accountability. This is the nexus of two talking points commonly cited as cornerstones of reconstruction and development projects, and prominent within the rhetorical sphere surrounding the post-tsunami reconstruction. The relationship between beneficiary participation and multi-directional accountability has yet to be formalized, and presents a major challenge within aid governance.

Based upon an extensive review of evaluation reports and documents produced by organizations involved in post-tsunami housing reconstruction, and a detailed qualitative field survey of six Acehnese villages, we discuss relationships between participatory approaches and multi-directional accountability.

We propose that application of participatory approaches should lead to heightened accountability to both donors and beneficiaries. However, there are a number of conditions for accountability that need to be factored into participatory approaches. The next section highlights the key challenges in ensuring accountability in post-disaster contexts.

Aid Accountability in Post-disaster Contexts

Around the same time as the intense reconstruction efforts in Aceh, the Paris Declaration Principles (PDP) were adopted by over one hundred countries (including Indonesia) at the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, (OECD DAC) in 2005. This produced agreement on five key principles to enhance aid effectiveness: ownership, alignment, harmonization, results and mutual accountability. The PDP declaration (OECD, 2005:10) defines mutual accountability as “donors and partners are accountable for development results”. The declaration suggests various ways in which partner countries can enhance both accountability and transparency. This can be done by strengthening the role of parliamentary systems in development strategies and/or budgets and by using participatory approaches in the formulation and assessment of development efforts. On the part of donors, it calls for ‘timely, transparent and comprehensive information on aid flows’ and for both partner countries and donors to jointly assess progress over their commitments.

As part of the preparations for the third High Level Forum on aid effectiveness in Accra in 2008, the Advisory Group on Civil Society and Aid Effectiveness presented a synthesis paper on the challenges faced by Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in ensuring mutual accountability. The following passage illustrates the complexity of ensuring accountability to beneficiaries:

Participants repeatedly observed, however that *contractual* obligations and power assured accountability to donors, including Northern CSOs, and often trumped the *moral and ethical* obligations of democratic accountability and control expected by communities, Southern CSOs’ constituencies, and the public at large. (AG, 2008: iii) (emphasis in original)

The distinction between upward and downward accountability points to different sets of challenges by the stakeholders. Upward accountability (e.g. accountability to donors from beneficiaries) can be ensured contractually or legally even if it contradicts ethical behavior. Such ‘contracts’ can be more easily measured *quantitatively*, and only need to focus on fairly tangible outputs such as numbers of housing units provided or monies dispersed in a

given time period. However, contractual demands can also undermine accountability when they overburden scarce capacity and exert time pressure on beneficiaries, for example, an overly short turnaround for legal disclosure of expenditures or sets of complex administrative procedures that require advanced auditing and management systems. All of these were witnessed by the authors in Aceh.

Downward accountability (e.g. accountability from donors to local beneficiaries) requires a more *qualitative* focus, as it is more of a measurement of how what is provided suits the needs and aspirations of beneficiaries. Such variables are much more difficult to both formalize and standardize within large scale projects, and their value is relegated in the immediate crisis period to secondary status, as the main focus is upon delivering aid in ways that are efficient. For good or bad, decisions concerning housing are powerfully influenced by perceptions of effectiveness, often by those providing the funding, which are based upon the premise of providing shelter as rapidly as possible. Additionally, within the development community there is a strong financially driven motivation to ensure accountability to donors. The motivation for formal accountability to beneficiaries has far less institutional weight, and currently lacks widely accepted templates.

Much of the discussion about accountability to beneficiaries, especially surrounding CBOs, echoes the prevalent themes within participatory approaches to reconstruction and development. The next section distinguishes between different types of participatory approaches that have been used in Aceh, and discusses the implications for accountability mechanisms. It is important to see if multi-directional accountability is an inherent part of participatory and community driven processes, or if even in such cases formal mechanisms to support multi-directional accountability are necessary.

Participatory Approaches

The calls for ‘inclusive’ and ‘participatory’ processes within post-disaster reconstruction and broader development programs have become ubiquitous (for a review, see Kenny 2010). Just about all aid and relief organizations champion the need for affected persons to be deeply involved in rebuilding their communities and livelihoods. Such imperatives are enshrined within influential international sets of standards for humanitarian relief such as the SPHERE charter, and the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC),³

³ For more details on the SPHERE charter, see <http://www.sphereproject.org/>.

and are exemplified in the World Bank's 2010 comprehensive guide to post-disaster housing (Jha *et al.* 2010). Furthermore, they are common within the mission statements and organizational philosophies of many NGOs and international organizations, as discussed in more detail below.

Recent research from a number of sectors shows a positive relationship between local beneficiary involvement and ownership of development processes, with beneficiary satisfaction and project efficiency (see CARE 2008; De Renzio 2008; and GTZ 2006). This is especially the case within the post-disaster housing sector, where there are distinct benefits for both beneficiaries and donors for efforts to be community driven (Campagnoli 2007; Steinberg 2007, *etc.*). Lyons (2008) analyzed the Owner-Driven Program (ODP), a decentralized housing reconstruction policy for those owning buildable land, and contrasted it with the Donor-Assisted Program (DAP), for 50,000 households displaced by the tsunami in Sri Lanka. Lyons found that through the development of local committees as part of the ODP, community involvement at every stage of the construction process enabled villages to be 'better equipped to debate and prioritize aims, deal with authorities and development organizations, and *demand accountability from representatives and agents*'. (Lyons, 2008: 394, *our emphasis*)

Barenstein's (2006) study of housing reconstruction after the earthquake in Gujarat in 2001 identified five different approaches to housing re-construction: owner-driven, subsidiary, participatory, contractor driven on site, and contractor driven off site. This study shows how owner-driven and participatory approaches resulted in both higher reported levels of beneficiary satisfaction, as well as more efficient and cost-effective aid disbursement, whereas donor (via contractor) driven approaches were less successful in all regards. Similarly, Campagnoli (2007) concludes that community-driven approaches were rated higher than contractor-driven ones, especially for satisfaction and transparency in post-tsunami housing in Aceh.

However, as was raised by Davidson *et al.* (2007), there is a wide spectrum of 'participatory' approaches employed in post-disaster situations. Using four examples of post-disaster recovery from different parts of the world, this study demonstrates that the spectrum of participation, and the actual levels of engagement that beneficiaries have under different projects when dealing with different donors and NGO's. Their argument is that especially in the housing sector, participatory is context specific.

Participation can take many different forms depending on the situation, policies and experiences of the donors and NGOs, and desires of beneficiaries, as seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Types of Participation and Implications for Accountability

Type of Participation	Description	Implications⁴ for Accountability
Passive Participation	The affected population is informed of what is going to happen, or of what has occurred.	Requires minimal downward accountability to the beneficiaries. Not necessary to have feedback from beneficiaries. Systems are built around accountability to donors and implementers.
Participation through the supply of information	The affected population provides information in response to questions, but it has no influence over the process. (for example survey results are not shared)	Requires minimal engagement with beneficiaries after the initial survey is taken. Information is processed and used by external parties without further verification of beneficiary involvement.
Participation by consultation	The affected population is asked for its perspective on a given subject, but it has limited decision making powers, and no guarantee that its views will be taken into consideration.	Requires minimal engagement with beneficiaries after the initial survey is taken. Information is processed and used by external parties without further verification of beneficiary involvement.
Participation through material incentives	The affected population supplies some of the materials and/or labour needed to conduct an operation, in exchange for payment in cash or in kind from the aid organization.	There is a higher and more sustained engagement with beneficiaries, and more of personal beneficiary investment in the process. This leads to higher accountability to beneficiaries, and requires more sophisticated feedback loops to ensure accountability to donors.

⁴ This column represents the authors' commentary on the implications of each participatory approach for accountability.

Table 1 (cont.)

Type of Participation	Description	Implications for Accountability
Participation through the supply of materials, cash or labour	The affected population supplies some of the materials, cash and/ or labour needed for an intervention. This includes cost-recovery mechanisms.	There is a higher and more sustained engagement with beneficiaries, and more of personal beneficiary investment in the process. This leads to higher accountability to beneficiaries, and requires more sophisticated feedback loops to ensure accountability to donors.
Interactive participation	The affected population participates in the analysis of needs and in programme conception, and has decision-making powers.	Leads to significant downward accountability and requires feedback loop to and from the beneficiaries to ensure upwards accountability. There is significant reliance upon local systems, and can be very problematic for some external organizations bound by tightly prescribed mandates.
Local Initiatives	The affected population takes the initiative, acting independently of external organizations or institutions. Although it may call on external bodies to support its initiatives, the project is conceived and run by the community; it is the aid organization that participates in the people's projects.	Maximum amount of accountability to beneficiaries. ⁵ All phases of the initiative are driven by local parties, and therefore are most likely to cater to local needs and aspirations. Extensive trust much exist between local implementers and possible external funders that resources will be allocated properly and productively.

Source: Typologies based on ALNAP (2009)

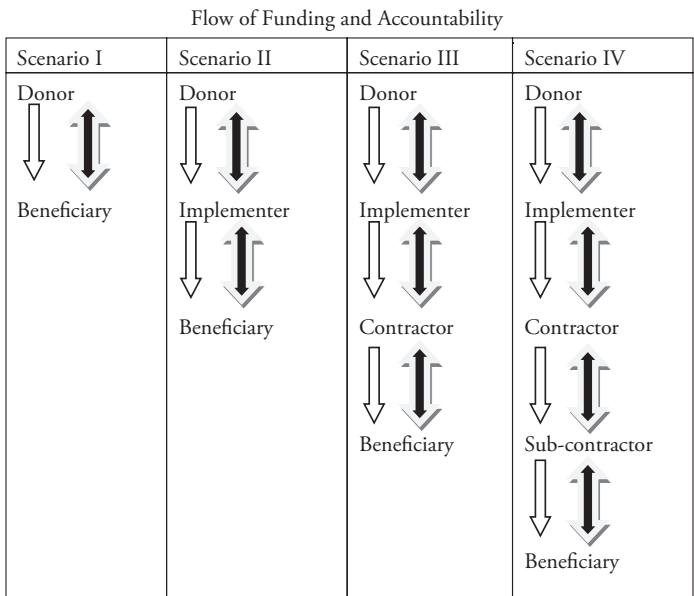
⁵ Allowing for the possibility that there will be disruptions in accountability to beneficiaries from local power elites.

Clearly, different types of participatory approaches are predicated upon different levels of engagement of beneficiaries in all phases of a reconstruction effort. There are pros and cons to all approaches outlined above, and it is often the case that increasing accountability to beneficiaries can lead to less accountability to donors as reliance upon local persons and organizations increases, and power is decentralized. Furthermore, heightened involvement by beneficiaries can lead to less predictable and controllable outcomes, which can be untenable to major donor organizations who need to be accountable their funders, whether governments, corporations, or private citizens.

The issue of accountability is also in part contingent upon the type of linkages between the donors and beneficiaries. Especially in large-scale efforts like the post-tsunami reconstruction, it is common for much of the actual work to be carried out by implementers and contractors — which introduces distances between donors and beneficiaries, and carries implications for accountability. We have mapped out the typical flows of funding and accountability that one finds within post-disaster relief and reconstruction situations (see Table 2).

There is typically a one-way flow in terms of funding, in that funding makes its way, directly or through a mediated process, to beneficiaries. The inherent

Table 2: Scenarios for Aid Flow Based on Intermediary Parties



White arrows show direction of funding; black arrows show the necessary flows of information to ensure mutual accountability.

nature of funding flows is both a strong determinant and a reflection of the level of engagement between donors and beneficiaries. As intermediate agents become part of the process, the greater the rupture in the direct link between beneficiaries and donors, and the more mechanisms are needed to ensure multi-directional accountability. As progressively more parties become involved, the information flow between donors and beneficiaries is increasingly complex, with higher chances for information flows to be disrupted or distorted. Because of the potential distance between donors and beneficiaries, it is necessary to distill out some more formal factors within participatory approaches to aid distribution and implementation that can be useful for evaluating multi-directional accountability.

At the country level, a number of core elements of mutual accountability systems in aid relationships have been identified by Steer and Wathne (2009), through a review of best practices in 19 countries, with particular attention to Rwanda, Mozambique and Vietnam. These involved agreeing on a shared agenda, establishing clear monitoring mechanisms and ensuring dialogue, debate and negotiation. They identified five critical factors ensuring successful mutual accountability mechanisms, namely: confidence and reciprocal trust; coherence between and among agencies; capacity and access to information; complementarity (including parliamentary oversight); and credible incentives. Building upon this, we suggest that in order to have sufficient multi-directional accountability, the following four factors should be present:

- 1) *Multi-directional flows of information.* All stakeholders have access to critical information including plans, agendas, budgets, sources of funding, time-frames, and expectations.
- 2) *Coherence and coordination.* All stakeholders understand their mutual responsibilities and ensure that their involvement or activities is aligned with others.
- 3) *Accessible and inclusive decision-making processes.* Stakeholders are brought together (on a voluntary basis) to participate in decisions that affect them directly.
- 4) *Ground-level oversight, monitoring, and direct involvement.* Feedback to and from the beneficiaries is taken into consideration during the construction process, with beneficiaries playing a strong role on-site throughout the planning and construction processes.

In the following section, we draw upon data from six villages in Aceh to see if the stated application of participatory approaches supported these four factors, and therefore if participatory approaches should be seen as more likely to

result in multi-disciplinary accountability. Annexe A also presents detailed information on key project descriptions by funding and implementation agencies.

Aceh and Post-tsunami Housing

The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami attracted a tremendous amount of international financial support for the relief and reconstruction of affected areas. The Indonesian province of Aceh was the largest post-tsunami recipient of foreign reconstruction aid, totaling in some estimates up to eight billion USD, compared to an estimated aggregate damage of 4.5 billion USD at the time (IOM, 2005). The tsunami response was unique in two ways. Firstly, there was a tremendous amount of overall funding pledged and collected for a disaster in the developing world. Secondly, the range of funding sources was wider than expected, as unprecedented private donations combined with official loans and grants from many non-traditional sources (TEC 2006b). The end result was large and rapid funding flows from multiple sources, channeled through more than 300 hundred organizations, ultimately to fund over 12,000 projects between 2005 and 2008 (BRR 2009). This created a situation in which a myriad of organizations were involved, many with limited humanitarian, reconstruction and development experience, which overburdened an already weakened local administrative capacity.⁶

Sources of Data and Data Collection Methods

We draw upon two sets of data to explore accountability and participatory approaches in the post-tsunami housing sector. First, we conducted a detailed review of the major needs assessments and evaluations conducted by organizations, consortiums, and independent parties of post-tsunami housing reconstruction efforts to determine the approaches used in the housing sector. To get a more qualitative perspective on how beneficiaries viewed accountability, we conducted an extensive survey in partnership with the Aceh Heritage Community in Aceh in February 2007. The survey focused on the cultural sensitivity of the reconstruction efforts, and on the levels of involvement and communication between the givers and receivers of aid. We conducted interviews with over 100 respondents in six tsunami-affected communities,⁷ with a

⁶ See also Koch (2008) for examples of such occurrences in other developing countries.

⁷ We conducted in-depth interviews in the following areas: Deyah Glumpang, Kajhu, Kampong Jawa, Neuheun, Lambadek, and Ulelhee.

representative mix of male and female respondents, of varying ages. The villages were selected because of the extent of the damage to each, which required almost complete reconstruction. The data was collected using applied anthropological techniques, with an emphasis upon participant observation and thick description. In this particular study, we mainly collected qualitative data, which limited our ability to undertake detailed statistical analysis. In part, we chose a qualitative strategy because many of the beneficiaries in the affected areas had been subjected to multiple quantitative surveys (of different kinds) by government and NGO workers. We found respondents reluctant to be ‘surveyed’ yet again, but surprisingly welcoming to less formal in-depth interviews. Additionally, we felt that there were valuable insights about the nature of aid accountability that could be usefully approached through a qualitative approach.

Research Findings

We conducted a comprehensive survey of the major donor and implementing organizations that operated in the housing sector in Aceh from 2004–2007.⁸ In total we included 79 donor organizations, pledging a total of 571,099,925 USD for housing reconstruction in Aceh.⁹ We examined the different forms of approaches used by each of the 79 organizations to build houses in Aceh. This involved extensive review of organizational documents, press statements, and project concept notes from the RAN database, which was used to coordinate aid flows in Aceh. In Table 3, we identified three main categories that

Table 3: Donor Approaches to Housing Reconstruction and Amounts Pledged

Approaches	Number of Donors	Amounts pledged (Thousands of USD)	Pledges as % total
Participatory	65	413,869	72.5
Donor/Contractor	9	135,027	23.6
Not Available	5	22,203	3.9
Total	79	571,099	100

⁸ This process was made complicated by the lack of standards for publically stating aid amounts committed, and approached used. Our work was done in large part by first compiling a list of all the main aid actors, and then visiting organizational web sites, reviewing documents, and inquiring directly from organizations.

⁹ Note that we are using the figures pledged to get a rough approximation for the money allocated for different approaches to housing. The TEC evaluations state that unlike in other major humanitarian crisis’, a significant percent of the funding pledged actually arrived.

encapsulated the different approaches used: 1) participatory approaches; 2) donor/contractor driven; and 3) Information not available.

As can be seen in Table 3, the majority of donors opted for some degree of participatory approach to housing reconstruction. All of the 65 community driven/participatory entries recorded that beneficiaries were involved in some form in the design and/or planning stages. This ranged typically from community consultation, and using housing committees, to providing external technical expertise to support community-based initiatives. A further 28 participatory projects listed beneficiary involvement in the implementation and construction stages, suggesting but not clearly stating the extent of direct involvement during these phases.

Clearly the overall public agenda within the housing sector was to make efforts participatory and community centered. However, the use of such terminology within the project concept notes and literature was often vague and generic, and therefore it is necessary to zoom in and focus on how these are actualized on the ground, and what the implications are for accountability. As part of our study, we searched all of the project records for the villages in our case study area within the RAN database.¹⁰ The results are shown in Annex A.

Based upon the data for the 31 projects related to housing in the case study villages detailed in the annex, most of the projects fell into funding scenario II, with the funding going from a donor — through an implementer (usually an international NGO) — to the beneficiary. Nine projects explicitly fell into scenario III which involved a donor — implementer — contractor — beneficiary flow of resources. This corroborates with the broader trends expressed in Table 2, which shows a stated preference for participatory approaches, and avoidance of contractor based approaches, and is further reflected in Table 3, showing the publically stated organizational principles for reconstruction espoused by the key NGOs active within the six case study villages. Table 4 shows the NGO statements of five key international NGOs in the housing sector, using community driven participatory approaches. These statements will be contrasted with the fieldwork findings in the case study villages.

In the following sections we analyze field level data from beneficiaries from the six tsunami affected villages to gauge whether the application of the

¹⁰ The RAN database is a comprehensive database that was established to help coordinate the overall inflow of aid into Aceh as well as evaluate progress in a systematic and transparent manner. The system consists of detailed project concept notes for over 12,000 projects, in theory the vast majority of aid efforts carried out in Aceh during the mandate of the BRR.

Table 4: Key NGOs in the Housing Sector Using Community Driven Participatory Approaches

<i>NGO</i>	<i>NGO Statement (and source)</i>
<i>Oxfam</i>	“There must be greater transparency with beneficiaries,” and “enabling people who will live in the houses to be part of their design and construction means, quite simply, more satisfactory homes.”/1
<i>World Vision</i>	“Homes are both constructed by utilizing the services of both contractors and community members, and are built to both community and government stipulated designs.”/2
<i>BRR</i>	“There is a growing conviction that the best way to address smaller, local infrastructure and household needs is to empower and resource citizens, allowing them to prioritize needs and take care of themselves through community-driven development.”/3
<i>Islamic Relief</i>	“Our approach towards providing new homes has been participatory and driven by the needs of the community. From planning to construction the local community has been involved in every step of the process; participating in decisions concerning the use of the land, planning of the site and design of the housing.”/4
<i>Muslim Aid</i>	“Muslim Aid is actually not only building housing by homes. In order to get this become true, Muslim Aid practices treating beneficiaries as our customers, respecting individual preferences, understanding cultural sensitivity, and empowering local capacity in order to enable them to cope with their future.”/5

Sources:

/1 Oxfam 2005. A place to stay, a place to live: challenges in providing shelter in India, Indonesia and Sri Lanka after the tsunami. pg. 12

/2 World Vision 2006. New beginnings: 2006 Progress report, pg. 3

/3 BRR 2005. Aceh and Nias one year after the tsunami: the recovery effort and way forward, pg. 45

/4 Islamic Relief 2008. Tsunami Indonesia: Three years on. pg. 3

/5 Muslim Aid 2006. Muslim Aid Indonesia Activity Report, November 2006.

statements from Table 4 on participatory practices leads to multi-directional accountability on the ground. We have arranged the data according to the four factors for accountability outlined earlier. A thorough review of the transcribed notes strongly suggests that different categories of beneficiaries focused on different issues during the interviews — even when all groups were asked similar questions. We tended to get slightly longer and more detailed interviews from male respondents, partly because they were more likely to have been involved as heads of households and thus played a central outward role in engaging with aid issues. It also reflected the traditional nature of male/female roles in Aceh.

This was especially the case with matters beyond the domestic space, such as large infrastructure projects and livelihood programs, which had a stronger male bias. It was rare to find women in the affected villages who played prominent public roles in terms of decision making and engaging with NGOs and donors. This is despite their presence in some of the meetings and focus discussion groups with donors. Interestingly, we found that males and females often had similar overall responses to questions relating to accountability.

However, the examples that were given could differ greatly between the two genders. Female respondents often focused upon domestic issues such as the types of food stuffs provided by donors or available in the community as well as the form and use of space in donated houses — reflecting the spheres they were immediately engaged in. Male respondents tended to discuss overall livelihoods issues, the problems related to finding jobs, local politics and decision making processes between the affected community members and the NGOs, as well as complaints about delays and quality of construction of the houses.

Finally, in the villages surveyed, there were some differences of perceptions based upon the socio-economic profile of the villagers. Most of the villages were very poor before the tsunami, and much personal and family wealth was tied up in physical assets like homes, agricultural land, and fishing boats. It was apparent during the course of interviews that there were underlying tensions within communities about whether assets should be replaced on the basis of pre-tsunami holdings, versus distributed equally amongst all villagers. The latter option was often the main interest of NGOs whom did not want to build upon pre-existing social inequalities.

While these findings are of interest for understanding the dynamics of community level aid distribution, such divisions were not apparent in our discussions about aid accountability, as discussed below. We found that the main points about the multi-directional flow of aid were held by people regardless of gender or economic status. In sum, the most significant difference was that the examples used by respondents to tell the same general story, were rooted in each respondent's personal needs and immediate foci of interest.

Multi-directional Flow of Information

During our fieldwork we found that in most cases people reported being consulted to some degree about village level reconstruction projects. However, our discussions with both beneficiaries and aid workers made it clear that consultations or ‘participatory frameworks’ did not automatically imply good information flow.

The processes of consultation that were carried out were largely perceived by NGOs as an indication that their projects were participatory. In conversations during the course of our fieldwork in Aceh, aid workers often noted limitations outside of their control, but also reaffirmed that efforts were made to find out what communities wanted and needed. However, many beneficiaries told us that consultations often did not function effectively. The most typical method of consultation was done through focus group discussions (FGDs), enabled by a facilitator/translator, with very limited actual interaction with a representative agent for the funding or implementing organization, and usually involving a select sample of people of the community. While some FGDs were more community driven, the process was mainly top-down. A respondent from Kajhu (female, adult, 17 February) summed up one of the main problems by saying:

Someone we had never met would show up, and their helper would gather up some people from the village. They would talk, and we would sit and listen.

Another major issue raised was the lack of continuous flow of information *after* the initial period of consultations. In all of the villages where we conducted fieldwork, people told us that once projects had begun, they had limited options for getting detailed information about the nature and progress of projects. For example, in Kampung Jawa, respondents said that they had no idea how much the housing cost, or what each family was entitled to. In all villages beneficiaries confessed to have very limited information about the overall structure and organization of the aid and reconstruction efforts, and the relationships between aid agencies. In one of the villages, Desa Neuheun, several of the respondents were unclear about whether they owned the house, if it was temporary, and were worried that they would end up having to rent it. In one case, a respondent thought that the land was owned ‘by the Germans’, an apparent reference to the NGO providing aid, even though we did not find any German NGO operating in that particular village. All of this clearly highlighted the lack of information that was received by beneficiaries, which seemed to have operated independently from the level of information that NGOs felt they were making available.

Additionally, people were frustrated by the lack of options for sending feedback to aid organizations. In Kampung Jawa, there was a major effort by Muslim Aid to provide a model of housing based upon traditional Acehese design. But in addition to common complains about the poor quality of the housing, there were numerous issues with the level of responsiveness of Muslim Aid to their feedback. One respondent (Male, Adult 19 Feb 2007) stated that:

because the condition of the house is bad, I and some other villagers went to protest to the donor (Muslim Aid). We were promised some additional monies for repairs, but after 8 months, we still have received nothing.

The head of the village mentioned that he:

tried to say something to Muslim Aid on TV, but there was no response. I asked if we could take the houses apart, and build new permanent houses, trying to reuse some of the material from the existing house, with a little money from them, but there's also no response. (Male, adult 18 Feb 2007)

Overall, the data collected in the field makes it clear that the application of 'community centred' and participatory approaches widely cited to be of use within the case study villages did not guarantee an open and transparent multi-directional flow of information between donors, implementers, and beneficiaries.

Coherence and Coordination Amongst and Between Actors

Given the sheer numbers of actors involved in Aceh, it is not surprising that coherence between and amongst agencies was a major challenge from the on-set. In particular, the TEC synthesis reports that problems stemmed mainly from overlaps, rather than gaps (TEC, 2006a: 51). While there are a number of international humanitarian standards that provide loose technical guidance to organizations, and the BRR further laid out a suggested framework, the reality on the ground reflects that housing was the product of both a diversity of providers, with a further diversity of qualifications, resources, and agendas. Our data makes it clear that there was a lack of coherence in the actual housing provided across affected Aceh, and in some cases even within specific villages.

Respondents in Deyah Glumpang mentioned that several NGOs provided aid in the housing sector. They reported that there were differences in the

approaches used by World Vision and Oxfam,¹¹ in that Oxfam provided “less direct aid,” and involved more subcontractors, where as the aid from World Vision was provided “more directly to the people” — although also through contractors. We found a similar situation when interviewing respondents in Kajhu.

A male respondent (adult, 17 February) from Kajhu, reported that

the housing development here is all mixed up, because the shapes and types are not the same, and this makes people in the community jealous.

When the same respondent was asked who was providing housing aid he replied,

Islamic Relief, Oxfam... at the moment, maybe more, including the World Bank... I think.

In Kampung Jawa, respondents said that there were three main NGOs providing housing. The village head (*keuchik*) in Kampung Jawa summed up the situation as:

today there are 45 house units from the IOM. The BRR have provided 160 units, but there are no kitchens, and problems with the roofs. There are 143 from Muslim Aid, which people are afraid to live in, and 40 units by Re Compact which are under construction. Finally, Islamic Relief has also helped with 50 house units, but they are still surveying the location. (Male, adult 18 Feb 2007)

He also said that there were at least five other organizations providing other forms of (non-housing) aid for the village, and he had no idea if they coordinated their efforts together, although he did not seem to think that they were. He mentioned that while it was common to have meetings with representatives from individual organizations, there were no overall coordinating sessions attended by all of the implementers providing aid. This was exacerbated

¹¹ We found that when we cross checked the data obtained from the RAN database about the organizations active in the case study areas with the accounts from villagers, there were often discrepancies in terms of who did what. It was common for some organizations to be mentioned, while others not mentioned. In some cases, people credited organizations for aid — that to the best of our knowledge — never provided aid within the said village.

by the fact that people throughout Aceh had some awareness of the differences in housing value and quality, as well as types of amenities provided between and within villages.

Just about every village we visited had visual indications such as sign-boards and decals suggesting the involvement of multiple NGOs and donors in relief and reconstruction projects. The competitive nature of NGOs in Aceh has been noted in several evaluations including the TEC reports, and the presence of different organizations, each with their own approaches, assessments, and resources, created a chaotic patchwork on the ground. This was confusing for villagers, who had no idea who to deal with on certain issues or whom they could regularly interact with throughout the entire process.¹²

One of the common issues raised in a number of major assessments as well as during our fieldwork was the high turnover rate for NGO staff (TEC, 2006a). It was very rare for people to stay working for an organization on a project from the initial assessment through the final stages, making it very difficult for beneficiaries to develop relationships with aid agencies. Developing strong personal presence and relationships is a big part of accountability, especially in a cultural context in which people are used to dealing with individuals rather than institutions. In several of the villages respondents lamented the fact that there were no clear point-persons that they had an established working relationship with.

Accessible and Inclusive Decision-making Processes

While many consultations occurred, and organizations tried to be inclusive during needs assessments, this did not automatically translate into actual decision-making by the beneficiaries. During our survey, people were often confused at the nature of the consultation used by NGOs, and uncertain about the roles of the main parties, and how they (the beneficiaries) fit into the mix. In some cases, there were problems arising from the people involved in the consultations, as illustrated by a female respondent from Desa Lambadek (Adult, 19 February):

there was consultation with communities about how they want their house to be, but only village authorities were involved, and so people can only accept the decisions that have been made.

¹² Examples are provided in the next section.

Very often, the consulting mechanisms used by NGOs were not familiar to the affected persons. Several respondents mentioned that the actual system used to make decisions were not good, and were not how people made decisions before the tsunami. When talking with respondents about the processes through which housing types were designed and decided, respondents commonly said that representatives from NGOs typically presented templates or blue-prints of housing styles. People were provided with a few options in terms of styles, and simply had to select among these styles. In Kajhu, villagers reported that they were given limited input into the final shape and design. One respondent, a female 27, said that:

the type of house is determined by the NGO without any discussion with the community or keuchik. The community was only able to choose if their houses had a terrace.

Another respondent from that village, female 35, said that the overall form of the houses

was already decided by the NGO, but people were able to choose some of the extras, as well as the color.

The head of the village mosque, male 63, said that:

Oxfam was the first NGO which distributed house aid in semi-permanent houses, but no one wants to live in them. Then the BRR provided some housing, but they determined the type of house, with no information from the community. The Canadian Red Cross gives more freedom to the community to choose the type of house that they wanted.

Respondents mentioned that much of the decision making and implementing occurred while survivors from the villages were still scattered in barracks off-site. Many villagers conveyed that it felt like the role of community members was mainly to approve the decisions of others — usually external parties, and sometimes a limited number of village elites. This comes in stark contrast with the project documentation in these villages, claiming that planning and decision-making was made in close cooperation with local communities.

Ground-level Involvement in Implementation

Perhaps the greatest challenge to beneficiary involvement was that much of the housing reconstruction was contracted, which was immediately obvious in

all of the villages surveyed. Out of all the interviewees, not a single person was physically involved in actually building their home, although many of the male interviewees professed some competency in basic construction. As one male respondent from Kampung Jawa replied:

We did not have NGOs come to build our houses before the tsunami!

As shared by the interviewees, the use of non-local contractors (and employing non-local labor) was a main complaint and cause of the poor quality of construction; as stated by the *keuchik* from Lambung and head of development division:

the housing aid from Oxfam is semi-permanent, and not proper for living. Many of the building workers are from outside of Aceh, like Medan. [Male 55 23 Feb 2007]

A respondent from Kampung Jawa provided a statement that really highlighted the near absurdity of his situation:

I used my own money to build a house, and the one that I was provided by Muslim Aid, I rent to workers from Java, who are building houses in the village for another NGO.

While many people were employed at various times in construction work (mainly through cash-for-work programs outside their immediate village), there was limited to no concerted effort to engage them in building their homes. In fact, it was common for most of the construction to be done while beneficiaries were off-site in temporary shelters and barracks. As a result, in some of the villages, more than half the ‘tsunami homes’ were occupied (often rented) by people from outside Aceh whom were brought in as cheap labor. The first question we had to ask in the survey was whether the respondent lived in the village before the tsunami, and many of them had not. Many respondents stated that there were limited opportunities for beneficiaries to actively monitor the construction of their homes on site. In general, respondents in all but one of the villages found that once the process had been handed over to contractors, people were effectively sidelined from the process, and the donors and implementers that conducted the initial consultations became further and further removed.

Discussion

Our research points towards significant gaps between the stated approaches and intentions of most NGOs and donors and the actual implementation processes used in the case study villages. While there was overwhelming rhetoric about both the need for accountability, and for the reconstruction efforts to be participatory and community driven, these goals were not always met. Although the majority of the housing sector was ostensibly based upon participatory and community driven approaches, there was significant use of contractors and sub-contractors as opposed to community-driven projects, resulting in upwards accountability to donors rather than multi-directional accountability.

Field interviews reflect several factors contributing to the lack of multi-directional accountability within the participatory frameworks employed in the case study villages. NGOs clearly used many unfamiliar methods for discussion and decision-making at the local level and most of them demonstrated a lack of detailed understanding Acehese villages' methods of communication. As a result, NGO approaches were not adapted to local approaches. For example, this led to the situation where the initial needs assessments by NGOs were often seen as commitments to affected communities, creating false expectations.

The proliferation of NGOs and unclear coordination in Aceh led to an overwhelming number of encounters between beneficiaries and multiple agencies and NGOs, each with their own operating procedures. Additionally, there were limited to no opportunities provided to beneficiaries to monitor housing construction, oversee expenditure process, provide immediate feedback, or ensure quality control. Indeed, the use of contractors and sub-contractors (often non-local) created further distance between implementing agencies and beneficiaries. While there are certainly many exceptions to this, our experiences in Aceh suggest that it was wide-scale, and characterized the vast majority of the housing units ultimately provided. Overall, it seems clear that the application of participatory approaches does not necessarily lead to accountability to both donors and beneficiaries.

A combination of three main factors contributed to this situation. Firstly, the perceived need for accountability to donors in an uncertain fiduciary environment led to a great emphasis on transparency and formal and strict accountability mechanisms. This in turn created significant barriers that impeded the direct and sustained ownership and involvement in the processes by beneficiaries, mainly in terms of impenetrable bureaucratic systems and procedures that were not fully accessible to beneficiaries. This was exacerbated

by the individualistic nature of many of the donors and NGOs, and their reluctance to ‘open the books’ and really share vital information with beneficiaries, and even other organizations.

Secondly, the pressures to build back better translated into build back faster. This, along with gross underestimation of local beneficiary capacities to be involved in re-building their homes, led to heavy donor and NGO reliance upon contractors, many of whom were not local to the village where they were working. This created a context in which beneficiaries had only limited direct engagement with the core processes of reconstruction.

Thirdly, there is significant disconnect between how organizations and beneficiaries view participation and involvement. As we have shown, most of the major housing providers in the villages surveyed stated that their efforts were inclusive and participatory. However, our research shows that it was clearly not the case on the ground, as there were major problems grounded in lack of communication, coordination and direct beneficiary involvement. All of these contributed towards, and signaled the lack of multi-directional accountability in the housing sector. The outcome was a proliferation of generic housing that suffered serious problems in terms of quality, suitability and cost-effectiveness.

We argue that the distance between the donors and beneficiaries caused by the wide-scale use of intermediate implementers, contractors, and subcontractors undermined vertical accountability, upward to the donors and downwards to beneficiaries, with significant implications for the overall recovery efforts. By distance, we are referring both to the physical separation caused by donors being physically removed from the everyday context in which work was carried out, and also in terms of the difference in organizational and beneficiary perceptions about how to best approach reconstruction. It seems that accountability to beneficiaries can usefully be seen as a function of direct beneficiary involvement, unfettered access to information, and the type and strength of the relationships that form between aid agents and beneficiaries.

Conclusion

While our findings represent only a limited number of tsunami affected villages, years of experience in Aceh since the tsunami reveal that the problems raised are representative on a much broader level. From the perspective of beneficiaries, there seems to have been considerable disconnect between the various stakeholders involved in the housing reconstruction, leading to a lack of accountability downward. When tested with field data, reconstruction efforts were found lacking according to all four of the criteria outlined in this

study — criteria that we believe are fundamental to establishing multi-directional accountability in post-disaster reconstruction projects. Across the board we received clear notice from beneficiaries that there was a significant lack of information flow, coordination, involvement in decision making, and actual ‘hands-on’ involvement in the design and construction phases.

There are many compelling arguments to be made for ensuring that beneficiaries are deeply involved in processes of housing reconstruction in post-disaster situations, to the extent that their capacities match with the practical needs of reconstruction. The most important aspects are allowing beneficiaries to drive the critical decision making, such as choosing locations and designs, allocating or being aware of the allocation of funding, and personally monitoring construction. In some cases, this consists of beneficiaries being directly involved in the hands-on aspects of construction — but this is not mandatory for the processes to be owner-driven. Our experiences in other post-disaster situations, which are reinforced by the literature, suggest that such problems are not unique to Aceh, and can be commonly found in many major post-disaster reconstruction projects.

Further research is necessary in three key areas. First, given the potential for miscommunication at the local level during the needs assessment phase, more attention should be paid by NGOs to the management of expectations — which is often more challenging than the needs assessment itself. Second, there is a need to study the incentive structures and monitoring mechanisms required to ensure a major transformation in how donors view accountability, a willingness to concede control as well as trust in the abilities of beneficiaries to determine the outcome of aid efforts. Finally, there is a need to revisit the ‘building back better’ strategy to understand ways in which the continuum between relief, recovery and development can be made in a more participatory approach with local communities.

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