

Blue Prints for Change in Post-Tsunami Aceh, Indonesia

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7.1 Introduction

On the early morning of 26 December 2004, a 9.4 rupture of the Sunda megathrust off of the west coast of Sumatra caused a tsunami that impacted countries all around the Indian Ocean, causing catastrophic damage and loss of life (Sieh 2012). In the decade since the event, billions of dollars have been spent on relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction projects in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, India and the Maldives. These projects have met with varying degrees of success and failure, but to the credit of local communities, governments, NGOs, corporations and private donors, tremendous progress has been made, and the scars of the event on the built environment have been replaced with new infrastructure and housing. Indeed, in heavily affected areas like Aceh, Indonesia, it would be difficult for a recent visitor to identify the areas that were destroyed in 2004.

For us, conducting research in Aceh over the decade since the tsunami has given rise to increasingly complex questions about the nature of change that has occurred. As discussed in this chapter, the reconstruction in Aceh was framed from the on-set by ambitious transformative agendas advocated supported by a wide range of stakeholders – each for their own reasons (Fan 2013). Here we focus on the rhetoric of transformation that drove the reconstruction, and discuss the diversity of ways ‘opportunities for change’ were pursued by different parties. The massive amounts of aid relative to loss (which is atypical in post-disaster situations) opened up paths for imaging a new and significantly different Aceh, which started with reducing vulnerabilities and increasing resilience and expanded to include economic development, new modes of governance and a re-configuration of social roles and relationships.

This approach presupposed that the pre-disaster situation was not a suitable return point. The past was problematic, the present provided an opportunity – a ‘clean slate’ – and the future was waiting to be written largely by external aid

agencies and donors. Given the decades of conflict, human rights abuses, isolation and deprivation that Aceh experienced prior to the tsunami, there were very legitimate concerns about the desirability of returning to the pre-tsunami situation. However, the prospects of designing the future drew a wide range of opportunists looking to map out a new reality in Aceh that was often more aligned with their specific agendas than helping the people of Aceh forge their own paths to recovery. We start this chapter with a discussion about change within post-disaster situations, looking at the ways that it can assist or impede the recovery of affected persons and communities. We then provide a detailed overview of the destruction caused by the tsunami and the structure of the reconstruction process. This is followed by three sections drawing upon our years of fieldwork in Aceh in our respective areas of specialization – exploring how various parties tried to integrate changes in governance, gender positioning and Islamic law into the reconstruction process.

7.2 Perspectives of Change in Post-Disaster Situations

It is becoming increasingly common for post-disaster reconstruction processes carried out by the international humanitarian community to be explicitly framed as opportunities to enact change to ‘build back better’. This represents a significant shift from decades of post-disaster emergency humanitarian relief work which traditionally focused upon the early phases of post-disaster recovery, and avoided engaging in long-term reconstruction processes. This important conceptual change has seen a gradual conflation of post-disaster humanitarian work, reconstruction and longer-term development initiatives, referred to as LRRD – Linking Relief, Reconstruction and Development (Christopolos & Wu 2012). This reflects, to some degree, the encroachment of the development industry into post-disaster situations, invited in part through the discourse of resilience and vulnerability that has come to dominate international discussions about disasters, hazards and climate change.

Over the past several decades, it has become commonly acknowledged that disasters occur when the impact of a natural or human-caused event overwhelms local environmental, social, political and economic systems (Cannon 1994). At the same time, academics and practitioners have expanded the range of vulnerabilities beyond exposure to hazards or physical structural weaknesses to include social and economic issues. It has been established that in many disasters, ranging from the Bhopal gas leak in India to Hurricane Katrina in the United States, social inequalities and vulnerabilities played major contributing roles in the overall impact (Elliot & Pais 2006; Hartman & Squires 2006; Henkel et al. 2006; Hyndman 2008; Hyndman & de Alwis 2003; Rajan 1999). Economically and politically marginalized groups often occupy vulnerable areas, the young, old, women and disabled are more likely to be negatively affected in a disaster, and

all of the above are often disadvantaged when it comes to receiving aid (Bolin & Stanford 1998; Fothergill 1996; Kaniasty & Norris 1995; Kilijanek & Drabek 1979; van den Eynde & Veno 1999).

Accordingly, concepts of disaster risk reduction have expanded beyond building more robust environments, to addressing underlying social vulnerabilities such as poverty and inequality. It has become commonplace for post-disaster aid to involve poverty alleviation, gender mainstreaming and good governance programmes, in addition to housing and infrastructure reconstruction to increase overall resilience to future hazards. Historically such concepts were more commonly included within longer-term economic development projects than emergency humanitarian situations, in large part because of different funding levels, time scales and mandates. They are also issues that require significant changes in the pre-disaster state, including 'capacity enhancement', to resolve. As the paradigm of post-disaster reconstruction has expanded, it has dramatically opened up the scope of reconstruction activities and agendas, to include 'fixing' anything that might constitute a vulnerability.

As discussed by Daly in detail, it is common for policy makers to think about disasters as opportunities: chances to hit the re-set button, reduce vulnerabilities and promote higher levels of development across sectors (Daly 2014; Daly & Rahmayati 2012). It is hard to argue, on the surface, with making things better. However, this brings up a number of important ethical and practical concerns. First, there is an extensive body of literature that strongly supports that persons affected by trauma desire a return to something familiar, therefore removal from pre-disaster contexts brought about by reconstruction processes can impede healing mechanisms and impair recovery (de Vries 1995; Gist & Lubin 1999; Norris & Kaniasty 1996; Oliver-Smith 1996). Compelling arguments have been made that allowing affected communities and persons to regroup and rebuild on their own terms is psychologically important, and can be more efficient and effective in some respects (Gilbert & Silvera 1996; Omer & Alon 1994).

Secondly, there are major issues related to the ownership of change and whom it benefits. In post-Katrina New Orleans, the reconstruction process was fraught with controversial statements and proposals to re-image New Orleans as a cleaner, safer city and to limit the scope of rebuilding. Powerful voices suggested that it might be better to not rebuild some of the most heavily damaged flood prone areas – as that would reproduce geographical vulnerabilities. As these areas have also been traditionally home to large communities of lower-income minorities, scholars, activists and citizens have all challenged this discourse of vulnerability as ethnic cleansing – the disaster as an opportunity for a largely white, powerful elite to remove poor, largely black neighbourhoods (Brunsmas et al. 2007; Hartman & Squires 2006). Naomi Klein has pointed out how buffer zones limiting the reconstruction of fishing

villages in coastal Sri Lanka after the 2004 tsunami were used as a land-grab by powerful developers who have taken advantage of the 'opportunity' to build beach resorts on land that was deemed too vulnerable for communities whom had occupied the land for generations. (Klein 2007; also seen in Thailand as discussed by Grundy-Warr & Riggs, Chapter 8, this volume).

Finally, it is questionable whether intentional projects of transformation can gain traction amongst local stakeholders and deliver the anticipated outcomes, especially when pushed by external parties. While somewhat different, it is nevertheless instructive to look at the massive reconstruction and nation-building processes carried out by the United States and its various coalition partners in Afghanistan and Iraq. In both cases, there were ambitious and comprehensive re-imaginings of life. Hundreds of billions of US dollars have been spent over the past decade to produce stable, developing and peaceful democratic states that conform to 'universal' notions of human rights, and American ideals of free market economies. As of 2015, this of course has not happened. Instead there has been extensive tales of fraud, waste and corruption – with local stakeholders seemingly not fully committed to Washington's vision, but glad to use this 'opportunity' to pocket hundreds of millions of dollars of aid money for personal benefit (Chandrasekaran 2013; Phillips 2006). Additionally, many stakeholders in both situations have adopted the rhetoric of transformation and opportunity, introduced by the US led coalition, to serve un-anticipated agendas – as seen in Kurdish moves for independence, attempts by ISIS to establish an Islamic caliphate, and moves by Iran to consolidate influence over the newly 'liberated' Shia majority in Iraq. Needless to say, none of these were part of the vision of the American architects of these conflicts and nation building efforts. While perhaps dramatic, these are examples of how contexts of change created by international actors can be harnessed by a wide range of stakeholders. The rest of this chapter discusses the 'opportunities' for change that we have studied during the post-tsunami reconstruction in Aceh.

7.3 Rebuilding Aceh

The impact of the 2004 tsunami on Aceh at the northern tip of the Indonesian island of Sumatra was devastating. The ground shook for almost five minutes, damaging housing and infrastructure, causing people to rush outside of their homes to safety. Twenty minutes later they were hit by a massive tsunami, which was up to 20 metres high, and swept inland as far as 4 kilometres. Almost a third of the densely populated city of Banda Aceh and hundreds of villages stretching down the western coast of the province were totally wiped out. The shocking nature and scale of the event caught everyone off guard, and none of the affected areas had sufficient safeguards in place to prevent damage and loss of life, or the mechanisms

and resources to effectively respond. In the hours immediately after the event, as the full scope of the destruction dawned on the world, relief efforts started, first at local levels, and within a few days with the engagement of governments, militaries, NGOs and private citizens from all over the world. In the months following the disaster, there was an unprecedented flow of aid donations, and the mobilization and creation of hundreds of aid organizations of all sizes, specialties and ideologies. This kicked off one of the largest and most globalized post-disaster reconstruction efforts in history.

The response in Aceh was initially complicated because the tsunami interrupted a long-running violent conflict between the Free Aceh Movement (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* – GAM) separatists and the Indonesian government. GAM, founded in 1976 by Hasan di Tiro, was an armed insurgency that fought for both an ethno-nationalist ideology and for an independent Acehnese state with control over local natural resources (including large quantities of oil and gas). As a result, the Indonesian government's presence in Aceh was largely limited to security forces, and there were low levels of trust between local communities and official state structures. Recognizing this gap, the Indonesian president invited the international community to provide assistance, while making it clear that the invitation was limited in time and scope, and that international aid actors providing disaster relief were not welcome to engage with conflict-related issues. The rapid turn towards openness by the Indonesian government and the massive amounts of funding pledged by donors, large and small, from around the world made the reconstruction of Aceh a highly international affair. More than 7 billion USD of aid was provided for Aceh, an amount that exceeded the total cost of damage. Many have referred to the aid process as a 'second tsunami', given the amount of funds, projects and aid workers that arrived in Aceh in the years after the tsunami, and its overwhelming impact on local life. While the bulk of the aid flowed through 'established' agencies within the UN system, professional INGOs, governmental development agencies and the World Bank, the influx of diverse aid actors – ranging from large charities from the Persian Gulf and corporate donors providing cash and services, to faith-based groups from small town America – complicated co-ordination immensely (Telford et al. 2006).

In response to the chaotic situation, the Indonesian government established the *Badan Rehabilitasi dan Rekonstruksi* (BRR), a special ministerial level organization to oversee the reconstruction that answered to the Indonesian President. In theory, but not always in practice, all donors and project implementers were required to submit proposals and concept notes for approval to be followed by regular progress reports. While far from perfect, this provided central oversight of the reconstruction process. Nevertheless, the proliferation of aid actors and entrance of established organizations into sectors where they lacked previous experience has

been widely cited as one of the main problems of the reconstruction in terms of efficiency and co-ordination (Telford et al. 2006). This created a highly varied aid landscape, in which diverse aid actors with different approaches all jockeyed for projects. It was common for multiple NGOs to provide aid to the same village, with multiple donors providing different kinds of housing, while other NGOs worked on (often disconnected) livelihood, infrastructure and social projects.

The future oriented zeitgeist that defined the reconstruction period, the convergence of a mass of very different aid actors, and the lack of strong, centralized control created opportunities for different stakeholders to push for their visions of what Aceh should become. In the following section, we draw upon our respective ongoing research in Aceh to comment on: 'good governance' (which was promoted by the international community); gender mainstreaming (promoted by both international and local stakeholders); and Islamic law (promoted by some Indonesian stakeholders). In doing so we hope to show that the disaster and reconstruction provided energized contexts in which cultural, as well as political dynamics were disrupted, opening up spaces for interventions by diverse actors to develop projects that were otherwise difficult or impossible to realize in earlier periods.

7.4 Governance and the New Normal

The international humanitarian community was openly concerned from the early stages of the reconstruction about the vast 'capabilities gap' in Aceh. The large amounts of aid money allocated and numbers of NGOs and donors wanting to contribute to rebuilding Aceh raised serious questions about the ability of local institutions to oversee and manage relief and reconstruction efforts, even after the establishment of the BRR to co-ordinate aid efforts. As it became clear that much of the aid and reconstruction was going to play out at the village level, concerted efforts were made to enhance the capacity of local administrative structures so they could effectively engage with external aid agencies, decide what support they wanted, and manage the practical distribution of aid. Explicit within these conversations was the opportunity to reconfigure and 'improve' local modes of governance – bringing them more in line with the visions of NGOs and donors who have long insisted on governance reform and structural adjustments at the macro-level. The aid providers optimistically hoped that abundant financial and technical support could both facilitate relief and reconstruction of Aceh's shattered infrastructure and livelihoods, while building capacity and advancing accountability and democratization in provincial and local institutions. However, the massive scale and complexity of the relief and recovery effort, coupled with the intense pressure on aid organizations and their staff to expend large amounts of aid money quickly and show concrete results to international patrons, meant that many opportunities to engage in long-term productive partnerships with national, regional and

local partners were missed or mishandled. In their stead, donors established a suite of dedicated ‘governance’ and ‘capacity building’ programmes aimed at rebuilding and reforming government in Aceh within a span of four years to fit within the official timeframe of the reconstruction.

Initial concerns about governance capacity were informed by Aceh’s recent history. When the tsunami hit, local political and social institutions in Aceh were already weakened from thirty years of armed conflict between the Indonesian military and GAM. Many government services were limited and confined to urban areas, leaving rural communities to largely fend for themselves. Seen as the enemy by many in Aceh, representatives and offices of the Indonesian government had limited influence on the day-to-day lives of most Acehnese. Furthermore, all levels of provincial and district administration were stunted by a lack of resources and skilled personnel. This was amplified by the political and economic isolation of Aceh during the conflict, as many locals had little experience dealing with outsiders. Indeed, with the exception of the security apparatus, for most rural Acehnese communities, interaction with state agencies was limited to village government. Surveys conducted by the World Bank indicated high levels of familiarity and trust towards village officials, which declined incrementally in response to the same questions about successively higher levels of government (i.e., sub-district, district, province and national) (Nobel et al. 2010). On top of this, the Aceh province was regarded as one of the most corrupt in Indonesia, in part because of the lawlessness of the conflict period (Aspinall 2014).

The already reduced capacities of provincial and district governments suffered further extensive losses from the tsunami. Several thousand civil servants perished, and nearly 700 government buildings were destroyed. Village-level structures were similarly devastated – one 2007 study found that nearly half of villages surveyed lost their village head and many more lost at least one other key member of their village government (ACARP 2007). Additionally, the tsunami destroyed government archives, including collections of land titles, tax records and birth/marriage/death certificates. This became a major issue as many affected persons lost all of their personal records in the tsunami. Many donors and NGOs had realistic concerns about the lack of needed skill sets and institutions in Aceh capable of administering a massive humanitarian crisis. However, as the international community and Indonesian government began to plan how to address these shortcomings, more expansive agendas about transforming governance emerged.

7.4.1 Donor Supported Good Governance Programmes

Driven by concerns about corruption, elite capture and the marginalization of segments of society, many aid projects carried out by international donors and NGOs during the reconstruction stressed the importance of participatory processes,

accountability and inclusive distribution of aid, and had mechanisms for achieving these aims hard-wired into their operating procedures (Daly & Brassard 2011). NGOs and donors brought with them a toolkit of approaches and terminology to help better provide aid, while at the same time, increase the capacity of local institutions. For example, donors often insisted on having regular community meetings that involved a wide cross section of the community, including women, as part of decision-making processes – an uncommon practice in pre-tsunami Aceh. Furthermore, it was common to see sign boards posted in villages with information about aid projects, including budgetary and financial details. Local partners, whether communities, government, or NGOs, were expected to operate within the procurement and accounting systems used by international donors and INGOs. These frameworks for providing aid were structured intentionally to increase administrative capacity at the village level, change the ‘business as usual’ approaches of patronage politics common throughout Indonesia, and institute a new culture of governance in Aceh – which many of our respondents seemed to welcome.

There were many donor-funded projects explicitly aimed toward improving governance on a number of levels. Somewhat typical of the expressed goals of governance projects, USAID’s Local Governance Support Program (LGSP) in Aceh was part of a national programme intended to ‘support both sides of the good governance equation’ through ‘support[ing] local governments to become more democratic, more competent at the core task of governance and more capable of supporting improved service delivery and management of resources’ while also ‘strengthen[ing] the capacity of local legislatures and civil society to perform their legitimate roles of legislative representation and oversight, and citizen participation in the decision-making process’ (LGSP 2007: 1). In Aceh, LGSP funded a variety of initiatives to support the first post-disaster election in Aceh in accordance with the 2006 *Law on the Governance of Aceh* (LoGA), which was followed by an Executive Development Program to provide training and information to newly elected officials of the provincial and district governments in Aceh. Thereafter, LGSP’s primary focus in Aceh shifted to providing technical assistance and skills development programmes for integrated participatory planning and budgeting.

Another example was the highly successful Local Governance and Infrastructure for Communities in Aceh (LOGICA) project supported by Australian Aid. LOGICA recruited and trained between five and ten village development cadre in hundreds of villages, provided training courses and ongoing technical assistance for village government leaders, facilitated participatory land mapping and village spatial planning, constructed village offices and meeting halls, and provided small block grants for community-led infrastructure projects. Another unique feature of the LOGICA project was the placement and support of skilled village facilitators

in every village where they operated for the four-year duration of the project. Follow-up surveys show that the quality and pace of recovery in many LOGICA villages during the early phases of the reconstruction process far outstripped most other villages that did not benefit from these interventions, suggesting that efforts to improve governance could produce positive results (ACARP 2007).

As the emergency relief phase drew to a close, and large-scale infrastructure work began gathering pace in 2006–2007, donor attention began to shift to ways of consolidating peace in Aceh and putting in place mechanisms to ensure long-term recovery and development. The EU supported the Aceh Local Governance Programme (ALGAP and ALGAP II), the Aceh Governance Stabilisation Initiative (with GIZ) and the Aceh District Response Facility (ACDF, with GIZ). These latter initiatives emphasized capacity building for local government agencies and staff, support for the legislative process to establish legal procedures and regulations for the LoGA, equitable social and economic development, and policy development to safeguard the legitimate interests of Aceh and meet the spirit of the Helsinki MoU. Another major donor programme promoting village-level participatory development planning was USAID SERASI's flagship Participatory Village Development Program (*Pembangunan Damai Partisipatif* or PEUDAP), introduced in conflict-affected areas in northern Aceh in 2008. PEUDAP sought to 'consolidate peace in select areas ... through the creation of social capital, the improvement of livelihoods, and support to good governance processes through the comprehensive engagement of entire communities in determining and prioritizing village needs and aspirations' (IRD 2013). Numerous other donor projects also began to crowd the governance space in Aceh, including the Canada/Aceh Local Government Assistance Program (CALGAP), a second LOGICA project, UNDP's Aceh Government Transformation Programme (AGTP), plus a variety of initiatives funded by the World Bank-led Decentralization Support Facility (DSF) and Multi-donor Fund for Aceh and Nias (MDF).

Considerable effort and resources went into programmes to promote and support 'good governance' initiatives in Aceh. While they varied greatly in scope and methods, they largely fell under two related categories: projects that aimed to build up governance and administrative capacity at sub-district and village levels to facilitate their involvement in the ongoing reconstruction process; and projects that aimed for longer-term institutional capacity building to support self-government in Aceh and consolidate the results of the peace process. Donors used these projects to craft forms of governance that were desirable by members of the international community, framed by concepts such as transparency, accountability, efficiency, technical and managerial competence, organizational capacity, participation, and democratic values and processes. Donors and NGOs integrated these attributes into the mechanisms through which aid was distributed, hoping to change village

governance practices in ways that would last beyond the reconstruction period and lead to long-term positive outcomes.

7.4.2 A Return to 'Business as Usual'

Today, more than ten years after the tsunami, one of the most striking things to those who have witnessed the reconstruction and are familiar with Indonesia is just how 'normal' Aceh has become. In Aceh unfortunately, 'normal' for the past several decades has been a political landscape riddled with conflict, exploitation, inequality and abuse of power (Aspinall 2009; Daly et al. 2012; Jauhola 2013; Miller 2009). At the community level, the retreat from the ideals of good governance promoted during the reconstruction takes a generally benign form. A 2014 follow-up study to the 2007 ACARP survey of village community governance and recovery found that most village community members claimed to be generally better off in 2014 than they had been in 2007 – indeed, many claimed that their current situation was better than it had been before the tsunami. This was due to a combination of factors, including improved infrastructure and access to markets and services, improved facilities and services, and, perhaps most significantly, the ability to tend their crops and gardens without fear (a dividend of the peace process).

The study also found, however, that many of the governance innovations and advances promoted by donors that had featured prominently in the 2007 study – including high levels of public participation in village decision making, free and democratic election of village leaders, and a generally enthusiastic embrace of gender equity principals and practice that had been inculcated throughout the tsunami recovery period – had receded considerably (Thorburn & Rochelle 2014). This can be attributed to a variety of factors. In 2007, most respondents were still enthused about the ability to freely participate in public meetings, which had been impossible during the conflict years (ACARP 2007); as the reconstruction ended the 'privilege' of participating in countless meetings seems to have lost its allure for many (Thorburn & Rochelle 2014). Village meetings at the height of the tsunami recovery period often included incentives to participate, such as distribution of food and provisions, equipment, jobs or cash grants. As the tsunami recovery period wound to a close, this practice ceased, resulting in a dramatic reduction in the levels of community participation in local government. The urgency of the relief and reconstruction period was replaced by the routines of everyday life. In such contexts people had less time, energy or interest for participating in extensive community meetings – especially women who bear considerable domestic responsibilities (Jauhola 2013).

Fundamental to this transformation was a routinization of village governance. Village leadership and decision-making structures have now been fully

reconstituted, supported by a suite of provincial and district regulations on the structure, function, roles, election and/or appointment of various village functionaries and committees. After the losses and disruption wrought by the tsunami and the chaotic recovery period during which government and donor programmes introduced innovative ways of doing business and established many *ad hoc* committees and associations, pre-tsunami forms and hierarchies have gradually been re-established or re-asserted (Jauhola 2013). Furthermore, even villages that embraced good governance practices during the reconstruction now find it difficult to engage with higher levels of state and national government which still operated by regular Indonesian bureaucratic processes – greatly reducing the enabling environment needed for government reform to flourish (Thorburn & Rochelle 2014). While many respondents recognized the advantages of more engaged, transparent and participatory processes, they accepted the shift back as part of a general overall return to normalcy.

However, a minority of the villages included in the 2007 and 2014 studies appear to have developed some semblance of lasting meritocracy, with some former cadre or facilitators who were involved in good governance programmes now in positions of influence within the village government structures. A few of these individuals have been elected to the office of village head, many more serve as section or neighbourhood heads or on the consultative council. The majority of these people, however – particularly the scores of women recruited and trained by different NGOs and aid agencies during the post-tsunami period – hold no official position in village government. Nonetheless, many of them continue to serve their communities in a variety of capacities, including running quasi-government community service organizations such as pre-schools, family planning and maternal health care units and devotional activities. Many women also make themselves and their skills available to lead or assist with the implementation of various infrastructure and construction projects when support becomes available.

At higher levels of government, maintaining ‘good governance’ practices has proven more challenging. In addition to the legacy of thirty years of conflict and neglect, the very framework of the Helsinki accords and subsequent national legislation to secure peace in Aceh embody certain ambiguities that complicate the task of bringing good governance to the province (Aspinall, Hillman & McCawley 2012; Lee-Koo 2012). The 2006 LoGA was superimposed on top of an earlier legal framework for decentralization of government throughout the whole of Indonesia. While the LoGA grants special autonomy to the province of Aceh, the earlier decentralization framework continues to apply at the district level. The precise delineation of authority between the national, provincial and district levels is a strong and continuing element of confusion in governance in Aceh.

More problematic still were two core provisions of the Helsinki peace accords and LoGA which – although they proved extremely effective in consolidating peace in Aceh – have nonetheless combined to create a situation that militates against the establishment of responsive and accountable regional government in the province. The first of these were provisions that allowed GAM to transform from a fighting force into a political party to contest – and win – local elections. Second were the new economic arrangements that have meant that Aceh is now awash in government funds, providing ample rent-seeking and illicit fund-raising opportunities for the former rebels who now dominate provincial politics.¹ Aspinall (2014) insightfully describes the retrograde tendencies dominating the political landscape of special autonomy in Aceh which he has vividly labelled Aceh's 'predatory peace'.

Former GAM combatants and other Aceh nationalists have been able to dominate the four elections that have been held since the 2004 tsunami and cessation of hostilities in 2005, gaining a stranglehold on both the executive and legislative branches of government in the province.² Many of the battlefield leadership skills and practices that former GAM cadres honed during the conflict years are now causing serious challenges in their transformation from rebel fighter to modern political leader. In regions where former GAM cadres enjoy political influence, there has been a movement toward highly top-down administrative frameworks enforced by militant lines of authority – replicating systems that GAM used during the conflict. Additionally, many former GAM combatants and leaders involved in the reconstruction by donor supported re-integration programmes have embraced strong-armed cronyism with the entrepreneurial zeal of men who spent years fighting in the mountains and feel entitled to their 'fair share' of the reconstruction funding. The combination of former combatants' dominance of the political landscape in Aceh, their well-honed ability to extract funds, and an increase in government revenue has created a perfect storm wherein donor and NGO supported practices of transparency, accountability and open and democratic decision making have little chance of flourishing.

7.5 Gender(ed) Politics of Tsunami Aid

Three months after the tsunami, Oxfam International made an estimate based on its survey in four villages in the Aceh Besar district that the majority of the tsunami dead were female, and that male survivors outnumbered women by a ratio of 3:1 (Oxfam International 2005). In the briefing note, Oxfam, one of the most vocal supporters of the 'gender agenda' that became widespread during the reconstruction period in Aceh, recommended that aid agencies pay closer attention to the gender imbalance in terms of loss and the potential imbalance in terms of needs and access to aid, and warned about the lack of gender-disaggregated data being used

to make relief and reconstruction plans (*ibid.*). Many donors and NGOs took up the call to integrate a gender sensitive perspective into their work in Aceh.

The demand for a more comprehensive integration of a gender perspective into post-disaster reconstruction is not new, but rather the result of several decades of advocacy at various transnational forums to address the gendered dimensions of natural disasters (Enarson & Meyreles 2004). Feminist research on natural disasters since the late 1980s has illustrated that the negative impact of disasters and the uneven recovery in their aftermath mirror the gendered dimensions of societies, and that underlying vulnerabilities are part of a complex matrix of gender, race, ethnicity, social class, age and sexuality (Akerkar 2007; Enarson & Fordham 2001; Enarson & Meyreles 2004; Enarson & Morrow 1998; Fordham 1999; Fothergill 1996; Hyndman 2008; Hyndman & de Alwis 2003; Morrow & Phillips 1999). Debates about the need for gender mainstreaming within regional and international organizations (such as UN and EU), transnational feminist activism and development studies grew to an apex between 2003 and 2005 as a result of the adoption of gender mainstreaming at the 4th World Conference on Women in Beijing 1995. In fact, as a result, what is referred to by some as 'governance feminism' has become the dominant mode for promoting gender equality for most international, regional organisations and national governments (Jauhola 2013). The response to the 2004 tsunami reflected this growing advocacy for gender, and was one of the first large-scale international disaster responses that made gender mainstreaming a high priority, at least as part of the disaster response rhetoric.

Lead by a number of vocal and influential INGOs and donors such as Oxfam, UNIFEM, USAID, etc., there was a great push to challenge the 'male norm' of humanitarian assistance to ensure that post-tsunami aid was fairly distributed and the needs and rights of women were respected. Gender programmes sought to address both women's practical and strategic needs (Moser 1993), in terms of housing, safety, livelihoods and employment, legal rights, land titling, inheritance and guardianship. Many organizations changed their way of assessing need, and designed 'participatory' practices to specifically include women, instead of just the powerful men in community/family leadership. During the reconstruction, NGOs often made aid distribution contingent on representative female involvement in community at the village level – in addition to staging separate female focus group discussions, etc. We have found that the active role of women within village decision making increased during the reconstruction. Additionally, there is evidence that at least some of the donor-funded efforts to support economic empowerment for women have been successful. Gender mainstreaming certainly raised awareness about gender imbalance, equality and female empowerment across tsunami-affected Aceh.

The explicit advocacy of gender sensitive reconstruction by humanitarian agencies also had a major impact on the ways in which the ‘discourse on gender’ was reshaped in Aceh in the aftermath of the tsunami. The government’s Bureau for Women’s Empowerment was formally tasked by the Governor of Aceh to co-ordinate ‘gender reconstruction work’ between the central and provincial government, international organizations, INGOs and NGOs. In 2005, the Gender Working Group (GWG), chaired by the head of the Bureau, was established as one of the many co-ordination mechanisms that were put in place to share information, plan collaboration and avoid duplication. GWG became a forum to discuss and share ideas and ‘localize the concept of gender’ (Jauhola 2013). This included the launch of a joint gender analysis of the reconstruction and rehabilitation process in 2007. The GWG report highlighted the missed opportunities to include women in the early stages of the reconstruction process, and demanded a clearer focus on women’s concerns, including: gender and sexual violence in tsunami barracks, and discriminatory implementation of Shari’a law (Jauhola 2013).

7.5.1 The Reduction of Theory into Practice

The advancement of gender initiatives was not without its problems, ranging from small-scale practical matters to broader theoretical and ethical issues. The quantity of gender mainstreaming programmes caused ‘gender fatigue’ amongst both aid workers and beneficiaries. Local NGO workers joked that if they wanted to get funding from donors, they needed to ensure that the project mentioned gender in its title, irrespective of the project’s aims. Many within the international humanitarian community grew frustrated by what became an almost rote promotion of gender. More importantly, the supply side pressure to institute gender sensitivity contributed towards a desensitization of gender as a meaningful concept – to the point where it risked becoming either a mildly intrusive phenomenon or a meaningless phrase thrown around to satisfy donor check-boxes. As often happens when something is dramatically scaled up, gender as widely applied in Aceh became a monolithic buzzword, commonly reduced to a highly simplistic set of assumptions by people unfamiliar with its underlying complexity.³

Somewhat ironically given the mainstreaming treatment gender received, gender theory has long championed critical reflection on mainstream and dominant paradigms, which are understood to be the product of hegemonic power structures which typically disadvantage women. The gender approaches promoted in Aceh by largely male-dominated aid agencies focused on a very narrow set of anticipated intersections between gender and disaster relief. Due to the increased sensitivity of gendered practices of humanitarianism, more focus was given to ensure the delivery of aid to women. However, less focus was put on understanding the varying

vulnerabilities amongst women – or ensuring that aid delivery was sensitive to other forms of inequalities such as gender and sexual minorities. Additionally, there was an insufficient focus on critical analysis of masculinities which, given the post-conflict context, could have opened new understandings of the crisis of masculinity that the conflict and tsunami were potentially exacerbating (Jauhola 2013). All of these should have been part of a comprehensive integration of gender into the reconstruction.

7.5.2 Disconnection and Fragmentation of Acehese Gender Activists

As gender was ‘scaled up’ and became a standard administrative appendage of the reconstruction, the ‘implementation’ of gender in Aceh grew increasingly disconnected from Acehese gender activists. Many external aid workers saw the gender agenda as a *new* intervention to Aceh, demonstrating a lack of understanding of pre-tsunami gender roles and the history of gender activism in Aceh. Furthermore, many external aid agents – including gender experts – brought to Aceh their de-contextualized pre-existing stereotypes of Muslim and Indonesian women as oppressed by patriarchy and ignorant of international advances in gender and feminist theory.

Many of the Acehese initially involved in the gender components of the reconstruction had been part of activist circles in Aceh dating to the earlier conflict period. This activism started as grassroots assistance to female victims of conflict, but also involved documenting gendered human rights violations (such as rape) by various parties involved in the conflict (Jauhola 2013). The first All Aceh Women’s Congress (*Duek Pakat Inong Aceh*) was organized in 2000, around the same time that the first Acehese academic and government bureaucracy materials on gender (also gender and Islam) were published. The Gender Working Group, formally established by the Governor of Aceh in 2005, was a collaboration between Acehese and Indonesian gender bureaucrats, Acehese women’s organizations, and Acehese, Indonesian and international gender experts working for international aid organizations. This increased conceptual discussions about gender mainstreaming and provided concrete advocacy and co-ordination on programme approaches.

By early 2000, the Indonesian central government had anticipated that decentralization following the fall of the Suharto regime might lead to new forms of gender discrimination, with Aceh named as a primary example (Jauhola 2013). Parallel to this, the politics of gender and piety had become a highly controversial component in the battle for political power in Aceh, and more widely throughout Indonesia (Rinaldo 2013; Robinson 2009). In pre-tsunami Aceh, there was an emergence of Islamic feminist scholarship, women’s/gender study centres at

the university campuses, and the establishment of state bureaucracies to advance the status of women's rights and promote gender equality. Finally, the establishment of new women's civil society organizations such as Flower Aceh, Solidaritas Perempuan, MISPI, RPUK, LBH Apik and Balai Syura Uerong Inong Aceh were part of the emergence of critical new local women's activist networks and organisations in Indonesia (Blackburn 2004; Wieringa 2002). To claim 'gender' was a product of 'tsunami aid' introduced by external parties misses important local, regional and transnational processes which Acehnese activists, scholars and gender experts had participated in before the tsunami.

Mainstreaming gender led to a bureaucratization of gender, with formal jurisdiction to define and oversee gender sensitive reconstruction and development initiatives given to persons and organizations far removed from women activist circles. This was particularly the case with state officers and the quasi-state reconstruction agency (the BRR) – all of which were deeply entrenched within male-dominated power structures. When the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan) report *As Victims, Also Survivors* (Komnas Perempuan 2006) drew attention to gendered insecurities that barracks and other temporary shelter arrangements were causing to women, the BRR's gender adviser publicly accused the authors of creating a 'sensationalized picture' of the situation in Aceh. Local women activists, who had for years reported on conflict-related cases of violence against women, but had not gained needed support from the BRR, became frustrated by gender bureaucrats' inability to act, and called for renewed focus on 'how we can use the report to improve the victim's quality of life' rather than debating on the statistics of how many women were being abused (Hamid 2006).

During the reconstruction years, GWG remained a loose multi-stakeholder network where individuals and organizations closely associated with it had varying, and at times, conflicting strategies for dealing with the politics of 'gender'. This divergence of strategies stemmed in part from different perspectives and conceptualizations of gender, and the practical deployment of gender as a useful tool to support the rapid distribution of aid. Whereas the provincial government agency to promote equality and women's empowerment stopped altogether using 'gender' in its' vocabulary, and anchored its activities in the implementation of Shari'a in Aceh, civil society actors and international organizations framed gender within human rights-based arguments, and actively engaged with feminist Islamic scholarship, for varying and multiple purposes (Jauhola 2013). The gender agenda pushed by donors and NGOs gave control of 'gender' to a small group of bureaucratic institutions which harboured questionable perspectives on gender equality – further reducing the efficacy of gender advocacy. Additionally, long-standing champions of gender rights were systematically marginalized, at least within formal Acehnese institutions, by the practical arrangements of the mainstreaming process.

7.5.3 Gender and the Rise of Shari'a

Simultaneous to the vocal demands to 'integrate gender into post-disaster reconstruction' other gendered discourses emerged in Aceh that espoused rather different views on transforming the role of women within Acehnese society. Interpreting the tsunami as a punishment for sins and test of faith, some religious leaders and activist groups suggested that the 'tsunami happened because women ignored religion' (Lindsey et al. 2007, pp. 243–244). Such gendered readings of the disaster were, however, by no means the only – or even the most dominant – cultural and religious meanings ascribed to the tsunami. Even before the tsunami, the formalization of Shari'a in Aceh had caused concern to both local women's activists and Islamic scholars that symbolic, literal and de-contextualized interpretations of Islam would portray women as the moral symbols and values of the society. Furthermore, it was feared by some that women would become targets of moral policing and control (Noerdin 2007). As discussed in the following section, the agendas of proponents of Shari'a in Aceh, framed within the language of social engineering, gained significant traction in the wake of the tsunami. In the process, the expansion of state Shari'a in Aceh came to be viewed as a threat to gender activists at a number of levels. Yet, there was no absolute divide between 'women's activists' on one hand, and 'supporters of Shari'a' on the other, as there was considerable interaction between women associated with NGOs who advocated for gender sensitive application of the Acehnese legal framework, such as the Islamic Criminal Law in Aceh, and leading officials of the State Islamic legal system (Afrianty 2015; Großmann 2015; Jauhola 2013).

A few years into reconstruction, local women activists began reporting that they were being labelled as anti-Islamic and non-Acehnese for promoting gender equality (Jauhola 2013). During the post-tsunami reconstruction years in Aceh it became common to hear anecdotes about the 'gender allergy' that had reached tsunami-hit villages on the coastline of Aceh as a result of the arrival of aid agencies and women's activists who were accused by conservative elements as aiming to change Aceh and break up families (Jauhola 2013; Laila 2010). Conspiracy theories were rampant about the outside, 'Western' gender agenda that sought to undermine the morality of women in Aceh and stir up discord between men and women. As mentioned elsewhere in this chapter, apprehension that a highly globalized aid process destabilizing everyday life in Aceh and introducing new (read, 'bad') cultural practices was relatively widespread. This was reinforced by the highly visible dress and behaviour of the thousands of foreign aid workers (especially female aid workers) that cycled through Aceh at the time. While the reconstruction was promoting equality and empowerment, many women activists were struggling to 'oppose' certain by-laws that focused on female morality, their bodies and the interference

of Shari'a in their private lives, while trying to counter the growing perception that 'gender' was an 'invading' concept brought by foreign aid workers.

At a regional meeting on the implementation of the UN Security Council resolution 'Women, Peace and Security' held at Kathmandu, February 2015, Acehese activists voiced their concern that international humanitarian aid fuelled new forms of political struggle that use the rhetoric of respectability, Acehese identity and the special autonomy status granted for Aceh to target 'dissident' women. As at the previously held All Acehese Women's Congresses in 2000 and 2005 (Jauhola 2013), the small team in Kathmandu reiterated that gendered violence continues to be normalized, and it has been directed at various religious, ethnic, gender and sexual minorities, but increasingly to women rights defenders. 'Gender' remains highly contested and politicized topic in Aceh.

In this section, we have discussed the 'gender agenda' as it played out in Aceh during the reconstruction. It is a complex issue to evaluate because it was successful at raising the profile of gender as an important component of crisis response; something on par with the more traditional sectors such as housing, infrastructure and livelihoods. Furthermore, it emphasized that gender was not a singular thing, but rather a cross-cutting issue that needed to be considered in all facets of the relief and reconstruction. It focused on achieving a number of important goals for both the international humanitarian community as well as Acehese gender activists. However, as it was scaled up and 'mainstreamed', it left behind the trajectory of gender advocacy that was developing in pre-tsunami Aceh, and produced an aid focused, functional and overly simplistic notion of gender that came to dominate the post-disaster reconstruction. While emphasizing a gender perspective had many positive impacts on the lives of women in Aceh, it lost the sharp critical lens associated with gender theory and neglected important aspects of gender that fell outside of a closely defined paradigm. Mainstreaming and integrating gender into the post-disaster reconstruction meant moulding it into the formal bureaucracy of aid. This raised its profile, but also dramatically undercut its potency – especially its critical gaze. Finally, it set gender activists in Aceh on a collision course with the proponents of Shari'a, an interesting situation where two different groups of stakeholders found themselves tapping into the transformative rhetoric of the reconstruction struggled to balance their conflicting agendas.

7.6 Islamic Law and Post-Disaster Social Engineering

One of the main issues that shaped life and public discourse in Aceh after the tsunami was the state implementation of Islamic law, or Shari'a. The establishment of Shari'a in Aceh reflects recent political manoeuvrings animated by the conflict between GAM and the Indonesian state, as well as long-standing agendas

of religious reformists within Aceh (Feener 2013). Of particular relevance to this chapter is the extent to which the impact of the disaster and the transformative rhetoric brought by NGOs and donors during the reconstruction were harnessed by proponents of Shari'a to provide new sets of justifications for their agenda, and to amplify their rhetoric of Islamic law as a tool for engineering social change. In this section, we outline the historical movements for the application of Islamic law in Aceh, and then discuss how the Shari'a agenda reconfigured itself within the context of post-disaster reconstruction.⁴

Widely regarded as an historical bastion of Islam in Southeast Asia, Aceh was home to some of the earliest sultanates established in the region, an extended anti-colonial *jihad* in the nineteenth century, and the 'Darul Islam' insurgency to establish an Islamic state in the mid-twentieth century. With the suppression of the Darul Islam movement, the Indonesian central government in Jakarta developed a range of mechanisms for state management of Islam in Aceh in the 1960s. This included the formation of an official provincial council of Ulama and the establishment of a State Institute of Islamic Studies (IAIN). Over the latter decades of the twentieth century, a generation of IAIN-based academics developed visions of Islamic religious reform centred on the idea that inculcating Islamic piety can serve as a means for transforming both individuals and society for the better. This included the establishment of a number of new institutions of governance and education organized around a concept of Islamic propagation (Ar./I. *da'wa*) that combined elements of modernizing religious reform, Indonesian nationalism and economic development.

The complex political situation in which state Shari'a was introduced was the result of decades of armed conflict between the Indonesian government and GAM. As the conflict dragged on, the Indonesian state increasingly looked for new means to supplement its military measures in attempts to consolidate its control over the restive province, including further experiments with the state management of Islam. At the same time, religious leaders in Aceh continued to push for new Islamic legislation on issues of public morality as part of broader agendas of Islamizing social transformation. By the 1990s, the escalating violence of the conflict in Aceh had pushed some in Jakarta to pursue further options to stabilize the situation. This opened up new possibilities for re-negotiating the position of Islamic law in Aceh, as local Islamic religious leaders and IAIN academics managed in this context to gain the ear of prominent figures in the new, post-Suharto administration to advance their state Shari'a agenda. In 1999, a 'Special Autonomy' law was passed that laid the groundwork for the establishment of a new Islamic legal system in Aceh over the first years of the twenty-first century.

Reaction to these initiatives from the broader public was mixed at best, and many of their initiatives were not successful. Zealous imposition of humiliating

and at times violent punishments by both spontaneous mobs of village men and more organized bands of vigilantes comprised of students from Islamic schools made news headlines and filled the air of coffee shops in many parts of Aceh (Syihab 2010). In terms of official enforcement however, not a single case was pursued through the courts until 2005. The formal establishment of Aceh's Islamic legal system thus made only a modest initial impact on Acehnese society, and despite the state's intentions, the new Islamic legal system did not gain popular support amongst the population, significantly undermine local support for GAM or suppress the level of violence.

It was only in the wake of the 2004 tsunami that the state Shari'a project made significant advances. We argue that this built upon a unique combination of the rapidly developing discourses of remaking society that were prevalent in the post-disaster/post-conflict period, the broader religious revival that followed the tsunami, and aversion to the imposition of 'outside' agendas brought in by the international humanitarian community. Proponents of Shari'a skillfully adjusted their approaches and merged them with the post-disaster response in a way that tapped into both local people's perceptions on the disaster, and also with rhetoric of development and disaster risk reduction – all of which was un-anticipated by the majority of aid foreign actors and donors that contributed to the reconstruction – many of whom were highly sceptical of Islamic law in Aceh and saw it as an obstacle for achieving their secular goals.

7.6.1 The Rhetoric of Change

The massive influx of foreign aid workers brought with them ideas and models of both immediate disaster relief and of reconstruction projects for the long-term transformation of society (Daly 2014; Telford et al. 2006; Telford 2012). This rhetoric of transformation built upon global discourses of developmentalism promoted by various government agencies and organizations, including the World Bank. A defining trope of this was an emphasis on the importance of going beyond immediate post-disaster recovery and using the opportunity provided by the trauma to develop not only physical infrastructure, but also new modes of living that emphasized economic development, disaster risk reduction, social equality, capacity building and environmental sustainability. This emphasis on remaking society that informed the 'build back better' agenda of so many agencies and NGOs in Aceh at that time was also drawn upon by Islamic religious leaders and state Shari'a officials in pursuit of their own goals.

The development of new initiatives and institutions for the implementation of Islamic law was thus ratcheted up to a new level as an ambitious project of 'social engineering' within a broader framework of 'total reconstruction'. Like many of

the secular stakeholders in Aceh's post-tsunami reconstruction, the ideological supporters of the new Shari'a system saw tremendous opportunities to transform society according to their own ideals of progress. The ideology of many advocates of Shari'a implementation in contemporary Aceh is one with a vision of future-oriented social transformation, insisting on the need to move beyond 'traditional' understandings toward a vision of Islam that actively engages with modern developments in fields including education, economics and medicine – echoing some of the reforms championed by NGOs and donors, while choosing to ignore others.

7.6.2 Post-Crisis Religious Revival

Concurrent with this shift of rhetoric about Shari'a and development, a broad-based but internally diverse religious revival further helped to breathe new life into the project of state Shari'a in Aceh during the post-disaster/post-conflict period. The evocation of religious responses to natural disaster is of course by no means unique to either Aceh, or to Islam (Riesebrodt 2010; Fountain & McLaughlin 2015; Feener & Daly 2015). The particular forms that responses may take in any religious tradition can be as diverse as the individuals that comprise a community of believers. In an initial mapping of Acehnese interpretations of the earthquake and tsunami, it was noted that while there were some who regarded these events as purely natural disasters, many Acehnese understood the tragedy as originating from God in diverse ways, either as divine retribution for the sins of the people, a test of their faith, or something pre-ordained regardless of human actions in the world (Saleh 2005; Idria 2010; Samuels 2015). Published collections of tsunami survivor narratives contain numerous accounts framed in expressly religious terms, with frequent references to the ways in which mosques (often the only buildings to survive the shock of earthquake and impact of the tsunami) provided shelter and salvation from those fleeing the disaster (Abbas 2006).

Official publications from the Acehnese provincial government also elaborated upon diverse understandings of what was perceived to be God's meaning and purpose behind such disasters. One of the most striking things about these various responses, however, is the relative emphasis on considerations of 'opportunity' and the future lives of believers. Additionally, Muslim voices in Aceh speak of Islam and the implementation of Shari'a in particular as helping to prepare for and mitigate future disasters (Fakhri 2007). It is believed by many in Aceh that ultimately God determines future disasters. In this view increasing personal piety and adherence to Islamic law were commonly preached as ways to reduce the possibility of future disasters; an interpretation that sometimes complemented, sometimes conflicted with secular risk reduction programmes carried out by NGOs and donors.

7.6.3 *Protecting Local Values*

During the reconstruction period from 2005–2009, Shari’a implementation in Aceh was also deployed as a bulwark against the kind of NGO-style ‘globalization’ that both Acehese ulama and the Indonesian central government viewed with suspicion. The state implementation of Shari’a was thus seen by some local Islamic leaders and officers of the central Indonesian state as having the potential to protect Aceh from the threat of moral degradation from ‘Westernizing’ globalization, while at the same time managing diverse projects of economic, political and social development framed by international donors (Jauhola 2013). Jakarta-based conspiracy theorists and Islamist activists used various media to aggressively argue that post-disaster reconstruction programmes could open the floodgates for Christian missionaries and Zionist agents attempting to turn the Acehese away from the true path of Islam (ibid.). Within Aceh itself, Muslim intellectuals worked on developing new strategies to counter what some perceived to be an invasion of anti-Islamic forces from the West, which, interestingly, was often a reaction to the more transformative agendas of donors and NGOs such as gender mainstreaming and good governance (as discussed in this chapter). Their efforts included the development of new Islamic propagation media and education programmes to imprint particular visions of Islamic morality upon the populace. Other governmental institutions also mobilized in the name of Shari’a as a response to perceived foreign corruptions in more physically assertive ways.

The broader politics of Islamic law in Aceh during the post-disaster period have been highly contested. With the gradual diminishing of the religious revival that peaked in the months immediately following the tsunami, and the electoral success of candidates and political parties formerly associated with GAM, there has been a marked decrease in the energies and resources devoted to the formal Islamic legal system. Today, there are significant voices of critique towards the state Shari’a project in Aceh, with actors from diverse sectors advancing a range of contrasting visions for the future of state and society in Aceh (Feener et al. 2015). Nevertheless, the development of the Islamic legal system there since the turn of the twenty-first century provides a powerful example of the role that religion can play in the framing of post-disaster relief and reconstruction. Disasters open up space for conversations on ‘vulnerability’ – giving chances for previously marginalized actors to advance ‘wish list’ items of social agendas that previously had only limited traction. In attempting to understand the complex range of visions of reconstruction and improvement active in post-disaster contexts across diverse societies in contemporary Asia, it is important to recognize that not all future aspirations for the outcome of reconstruction processes are elaborated in the secularized idiom of development widely accepted within international humanitarian circles.

7.7 Conclusion

Aceh was changed in many ways by the tsunami and reconstruction, but looking at the situation ten years after the event it seems that many aspects of everyday life have gradually gravitated back toward pre-tsunami patterns. Most, if not all, people have been rehoused, largely within or close to the sites of their previous homes. While new post-tsunami donor houses differ in terms of size and layout, people have been some combination of adjusting to their new spatial environments and/or modifying these environments to better suit their lives. Many have resumed work, and the streets of Banda Aceh today are bustling with activity, filled with new shops and firmly in a post-reconstruction phase. While not always ideal, many widows and widowers have re-married, new children have been born and most of those orphaned by the tsunami absorbed into families and local communities. The physical processes of reconstruction, while open to legitimate critique about how it was carried out, has been, on balance, successful. Aceh has been rebuilt and life goes on for most. In the early days after the tsunami hit, all of the above would have seemed virtually unattainable to people surveying the extent of the devastation.

However, it should be noted that many of the changes optimistically promoted during the reconstruction by a variety of stakeholders have not fully developed as planned. As part of a major study we have been conducting on the sustainability of aid and social transformations in Aceh, we find that Aceh is not much safer than before the tsunami, with the vast majority of reconstructed housing and infrastructure situated within the tsunami inundation zone, and prone to subsidence and flooding. As recent research has established that a previous manifestation of Banda Aceh was destroyed by a tsunami at the end of the fourteenth century AD and strongly suggests the possibility of future tsunami in the same area (Sieh et al. 2015), questions need to be asked about whether vulnerabilities were reduced or replicated by the international community. Furthermore, our initial findings, in part discussed in this chapter, suggest that across many sectors ambitious plans by often radically different stakeholders for fundamentally changing life in Aceh have fallen short. Reconstructed villages have largely resumed pre-tsunami village governance practices – and in some cases have become worse in terms of strong-armed leaders, elite capture and patronage politics. While there have been some changes in the position of women within village life, most have returned to traditional female roles. While there are some whom have embraced the reformed piety and morality of state Shari'a, much of the population seems to chafe at the extreme ends of moral policing that it brought.

Closer inspection of social dynamics over the decade since the disaster reveals countless small changes that seem to have occurred organically in the post-tsunami

context. For example, many young Acehnese who participated in the reconstruction or worked for aid agencies have used their accumulated skills, resources, knowledge, connections and confidence to develop careers that they most likely otherwise would never have embarked upon. Many smart, opportunistic Acehnese tapped into the energy of transformation and started businesses, gone overseas to continue their education, or become permanent professional members of the international humanitarian community – drawing on their experiences to help others affected by disasters elsewhere. Some of this comes from participation within donor and NGO supported projects, such as the LOGICA good governance programme. However, most of it seems to be more the result of personal involvement within the reconstruction process, practical experiences gained from directly participating within the rebuilding of their homes and lives, and perhaps some form of inspiration from seeing Aceh rebound from utter destruction.

For some of our respondents, the regression back to normal and the end of the spaces opened by the international presence and the unique dynamics of an aid ecosystem during the reconstruction period, have been disappointing. We spoke with many who were frustrated when the changes they appreciated and welcomed receded as things went back to ‘business as usual’. Ultimately most of the changes supported by NGOs, donors and state agencies required their continued presence to sustain them. This raises important questions about whether ambitious, transformative agendas informed by longer-term economic development ideas or visions of sweeping social transformation, can and should be integrated into the intense, chaotic short term time frame typical of most post-disaster situations.

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Notes

- 1 The Helsinki MoU and LoGA pledged Aceh 70 per cent of revenue from all current and future hydrocarbon deposits and natural resources in Aceh and the territorial seas surrounding Aceh, plus an extra 2 per cent of national general allocation funds (DAU) for fifteen years starting in 2008 and 1 per cent for five years after that. This amounts to an estimated 1.7 billion USD in additional ‘Special Autonomy’ revenue per annum for the province.
- 2 The first direct executive elections in 2006/07 saw the election of GAM-affiliated candidates to the office of governor and vice governor, and ten of the twenty-three district head and mayor contests. The newly-established Partai Aceh (Aceh Party), the official electoral arm of GAM, captured 47 per cent of the popular vote and won thirty-three of sixty-nine seats in the provincial legislature, and 237 of 645 district and municipality-level seats across the province, including a majority of seats in seven district legislatures and a plurality in nine others. In the next round of executive elections in 2012, the Partai Aceh candidates for governor and vice-governor easily ousted the incumbent (former independent) candidates. Partai Aceh candidates also secured nine of seventeen district head and mayor positions contested (three by run-off), with national parties and coalition candidates winning the remainder. In the most recent legislative elections in April 2014, Aceh’s voters handed Partai Aceh a strong message of disapproval. The party still came out on top, but with significantly reduced proportions. In the provincial legislature, Partai Aceh’s plurality dropped from 48 per cent (thirty-three out of sixty-nine seats) to just under 36 per cent (twenty-nine of eighty-one seats). Their margins in district head and mayoral elections similarly declined, losing ground in several of their traditional strongholds.
- 3 See similar analysis from other Indian Ocean earthquake and the tsunami contexts, (e.g., Akerkar 2007; Fulu 2007; Hyndman 2008). As Thurheer’s (2009) analysis from Sri Lanka suggests, however, recipients or sub-contractors of tsunami aid in Aceh were not passive victims of aid governmentality, but also actively use categories and aid for strategic self-positioning and new forms of agency.
- 4 The discussion of the implementation of Islamic law that follows here is drawn from Feener (2013).

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