



Resilience in Post Disaster Societies: From Crisis to Development

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From earthquakes to hurricanes and floods, between 2004 and 2008, no less than eight major natural disasters occurred in the Asian region alone (Murdoch and Cutler, 2008). Most notably, the 2004 Asian tsunami left its mark on the collective psyche by its sheer scope and number of casualties, with an estimated 300,000 deaths and thousands more injured. Although there has been rising global awareness and lesson sharing on the human catastrophes associated with the proliferation of natural disasters, there remains many misunderstandings on appropriate approaches to recovery, given the specific socio-cultural, political and economic contexts of the affected zones. For example, two years after the massive Haiti earthquake (which left an estimated 312,000 dead), the recovery is still fraught with difficulties arising from a range of factors including the unstable political situation and overall lack of leadership.

But one important facet of the recovery phase within post-disaster societies which is often neglected is the resilience of the affected community. Resilience, as a response to natural and/or human disasters, is understood as the degree to which members of a community and its ecological system are able to self-organize, enabling the population to learn about and adapt to the new situation and deal with the resulting uncertainties (Agder *et al.*, 2005). Hence, this concept encompasses a community's capacity to adapt and return to a stable state in the wake of a major disruption.

A classic piece on the sociological study of post-disaster societies is the 1976 research carried out by Kai T. Erickson on the collapse of a dam in a mining

region of West Virginia which “took everything on its path.” The book chronicles how the sheer destructiveness of the flood not only wiped away the physical environment, but also dissolved the social fabric of the community, and left those who survived feeling hopeless and unable to show resilience in the face of adversity. Contrary to the studies at the time, which emphasized how an “altruistic euphoria” (Wallace, 1956; Barton, 1969) could transpire after a disaster as people come together to reconstruct the community, this did not happen in post-flood Buffalo Creek. In the latter case, the number of victims greatly outnumbered the non-victims, and the subsequent lack of people made it difficult for the survivors to reconstitute their life around the values that had existed prior to the flood. In addition, the government did a poor job in assisting the population; likewise, representatives of the mining company that had been responsible for the disaster treated the survivors in a cold and business-like manner.

In the same vein, our contributions note the important role of external entities such as local/national governments, Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), while building on the resilience of affected community. They analyze how post-disaster societies transition from a crisis situation to the development of their economies, social networks and physical structures. As some of the following articles demonstrate (studies by Brassard and Daly, and Kitzbichler), a community’s capacity to recover from and surmount the experience of natural disaster is more likely to be successful if the recovery process is not only grounded in the socio-economic needs but also in the ethno-cultural beliefs and practices (See also Rajkumar, Premkumar and Tharyan, 2009).

International organizations which are highly dependent on external funding may be affected by donor or ‘charity fatigue’ (BBC, 2005) as natural catastrophes are becoming increasingly a part of the media experience, be it from television or web-based media. This fact partially explains why aid often comes in short-term cycles, which can make it difficult to sustain projects to help rebuild communities over the long-term (See the article by Ford and Dibley). For example, following the 2008 Pakistan earthquake, the significant time lags between donor pledges and actual disbursement, led the international civil society to react strongly. The emergence of multiple stakeholders from public, private and non-profit sectors in post-disaster recovery has led disasters and post-disasters studies to become globalized (Khondker, 2009).

In the context of major disasters occurring in Asian developing countries such as Indonesia and the Philippines, the linkages between crisis, relief and development are often disjointed due to unclear roles, lack of coordination, and lack of long term planning among stakeholders. For example, Buchanan-

Smith and Maxwell (1994) argue that the main constraints are due to institutional and political barriers. More recently, Schipper and Pelling (2006) find that better integration between disaster risk reduction and international development mandates such as the Millennium Development Goals can help foster better responses to disasters but are often marred by conflicting policy goals.

This collection of field based studies aims to provide a better understanding of disaster response, from an interdisciplinary approach. The papers look at the consequences of natural disasters, on individuals, communities and societies from a wide spectrum of analytical approaches ranging from social, environmental and ecological vulnerabilities, to collaborative approaches from an organizational perspective, to the impact of natural disasters on labour movements, and peace-building efforts and the 'build back better' strategy. Following an overview of each paper and their individual contribution to the literature on disaster studies, this introduction brings together some of the cross cutting findings emerging from these in-depth field studies and informing the growing policy debates surrounding post-disaster reconstruction and development.

In sum, this special edition investigates three key questions. First, how does the recovery process from natural disasters impact the social, economic and political landscape of the affected communities? (See papers by Rachel Schiller and Emma Porio). Second, how do affected post-disaster communities interact and partner with local and international institutions during the transition from relief efforts to reconstruction? (See papers by Allen Lai and by Michele Ford and Thushara Dibley) Third, to what extent can participatory processes in the recovery phase tap the resilience of natural disaster survivors? (See papers by Patrick Daly and Caroline Brassard, and by Stephan Kitzbichler)

In the first paper on "*Vulnerability, Adaptation and Resilience to Flood and Climate Change-Related Risks among Marginal, Riverine Communities in Metro Manila*", Emma Porio argues there are strong linkages between environmental and ecological vulnerabilities and social vulnerability in affected households. Her findings are based on a survey of 300 urban poor households in fourteen different communities near Metro Manila, Philippines, that suffered from the consequences of the 2008/09 floods. The research illustrates the various ways communities adapted in order to mitigate the risks associated with climate change and natural disaster. Among the most interesting adaptive mechanisms emerging from her study is what she calls a "water-based lifestyle," as demonstrated by the propensity among residents to add an extra story to their house as a mean of escaping rising floodwaters. While a decade ago gender was an understudied theme in post-disaster studies, this piece is a welcome

addition to this growing field; Porio's study shows how women were often more affected by recurring catastrophe due to their role as the primary caregiver for the family (See also Peacock *et al.*, 1997; Enarson and Morrow, 2000; Neumayer and Pluemper, 2007).

The second paper, "*Organizational Collaborative Capacities in Post Disaster Society: An Evidence-based Integrative Resilience Model*" looks at post-disasters from a conceptual standpoint. In his paper, Allen Lai contrasts models of organizational collaborative capacities in disaster management, based on the Tsunami of 2004 and the Wenchuan Earthquake of 2008. The author tests the integrative resilience model through the case-studies of Taiwan Red Cross for the 2004 Tsunami and 2008 Wenchuan Earthquake relief operations. Lai concludes on the factors that are conducive to collaboration in the context of non-profit organizations in post-disaster contexts. Building on the works from Bardach (1998), Weick (2001) and Bryson *et al.* (2006), he develops an analytical framework to measure collaborative capacities of non-profit organizations from the perspectives of orientation capacity, structural capacity, communication capacity and resource capacity. He argues that strengthening each of these capacities is essential to public collaborative management in the context of post disaster societies.

The remaining four papers in this collection take an in-depth and critical view of the reconstruction process after the Asian tsunami, specifically in the most affected province of Aceh, one of the poorest in Indonesia. The articles on Aceh constitute a particularly rich analytical contribution due to the unprecedented intensity of relief efforts there, and the diversity of innovative approaches in a post-disaster and post-conflict area.

The paper by Michele Ford and Thushara Dibley entitled "*Developing a Movement? Aid-Based Mediated Diffusion as a Strategy to Promote Labour Activism in post-Tsunami Aceh*" studies the developments in trade union development aid as a promotion platform for labour activism in Aceh. The authors investigate how trade union development aid failed to ensure the sustainability of the Acehnese labour movement after the 2004 tsunami. The findings are based on in-depth interviews of union actors in Aceh and participant-observations of various events, such as union training sessions. Ford and Dibley argue that the focus on reconstruction and time pressures of the post-tsunami aid cycle were important constraints on the strengthening of the union movement. This work is a welcome piece, as it is very rare for literature on labour movements to explore the prospect and consequences of building a movement through transnational interactions. Her contribution on understanding labor movements in a post-disaster context — that is, members being involved in humanitarian and development work as well promoting the local trade union

movement — appears to overwhelm the capacity of those involved to foster a viable labour movement in a post-disaster society, at least in the short-term. Indeed, by being involved in only one task, providing the emotional support to survivors of disaster, Bluen and Edelstein (1993) show how trade unions, in another context, had a positive impact in minimizing the effect of the catastrophe (Other work on trade-unions' involvement in post-disaster society see Rice, 2006).

In her paper on “*Reconciliation in Aceh: Addressing the Social Effects of Prolonged Armed Conflict*”, Rachel Schiller examines the psychological effects of the 2004 tsunami and its impact on post-conflict reconciliation in Aceh. Schiller addresses an aspect of post-disaster society which is often neglected, namely, the psychological effect of an event such as prolonged arm conflict, which is also experienced or interpreted as a disaster. Her study concludes that traditional interventions within post-conflict peace-building efforts need to integrate intergroup relations theory and techniques as a necessary condition for advancing the reconciliation agenda. This study contributes to the field of international conflict resolution by transposing the contact theory of the psychologist Gordon Allport (1954), which aims at reducing intergroup prejudice, to a non-Western context and post-conflict society. (On the positive impact of intergroup contact see also Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006; Hewstone, Cairns *et al.* 2006).

The final two papers focus on the housing reconstruction sector in post-tsunami Aceh, and are based on anthropological and ethnographic fieldwork in several villages in Aceh province, Indonesia, between 2005 and 2010. These complementary papers demonstrate the inherent trade-offs and tensions arising from using participatory approaches to housing reconstruction from the perspectives of donors, direct implementers and beneficiaries.

In “*Aid Accountability and Participatory Approaches in Post-Disaster Housing Reconstruction*”, Patrick Daly and Caroline Brassard focus on the perception of the different stakeholders and the implications for accountability, transparency and equitability regarding housing reconstruction. Starting from early evaluation reports such as the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition (TEC 2006, 2007), the International Organisation for Migration (IOM, 2005) and the Badan Rehabilitasi dan Rekonstruksi (BRR, 2005), Daly and Brassard demonstrate the gap between the initial NGOs' and donors' perceptions of the reconstruction process and the beneficiaries' perception of it, based on extensive field interviews in six villages in Aceh province, reviews of donor documentation and specific project data from the RAN database. The gaps between stated approaches and actual implementation processes tend to be a result of a combination of three factors. The uncertain fiduciary environment and

bureaucratic barriers affected sustained ownership and involvement by the beneficiaries, which was further hampered by an overall lack of transparency by donors. Their study points towards the underlying causes and effects from the perspective of multi-directional accountability. (See also Steinberg, 2007; Barenstein and Iyengar, 2009)

Finally, Stephan Kitzbichler reviews the ‘build back better’ strategy, by contrasting the contractor and self-build approaches used in several villages on the north-east coast of Aceh in “*Built back better? Housing reconstruction in Aceh after the Tsunami Disaster of 2004*”. Kitzbichler analyses the challenges to and benefits of stronger participational reconstruction approaches. His fieldwork also points out gender-specific issues arising from institutional and legal bottlenecks and discusses the consequences of housing aid distribution on the social climate within villages. His research builds on the works of Barakat (2003) and Kennedy *et al.* (2007), and demonstrates how community ties and social networks can be strengthened through the use of self-build approaches in the housing sector.

In conclusion, this collection of articles offers three major ways of enhancing the broader policy debate on effective ways to ensure stable development in societies that have been subject to natural disaster. First, the post-disaster recovery process can have a positive effect on communities’ social and political landscape, if local actors are able to receive financial and emotional support from national and international organizations. By contrast, subjects’ lack of power in poor communities translates into their inability to mobilize political elites. This not only limits their access to direct help during the recovery process, but also constrains their ability to change the social context by putting an end to the recurring disasters which create a cycle of poverty. Secondly, the interaction between members of the post-disaster society and the international, national and local aid and charity organisations requires new forms of partnerships which ensure meaningful roles for disaster survivors in rebuilding their respective lives, instead of being passive beneficiaries of aid. In addition, outsiders’ help in developing civil society failed due to their multi-tasking involvement in humanitarian aid and the short-term basis of the aid cycle, questioning the efficiency of the aid model in promoting civil society. Thirdly, in the housing reconstruction sector, the international organizations need to move beyond the rhetoric of participation and actually tap into the resilience, knowledge and culture of the local communities. Based on various recent case studies in Southeast Asia, these articles foster a deeper understanding of the importance of survivors’ culture, of the role of informal networks of self-help and other survival and coping strategies, as part of the transition from crisis to development.

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