Being Accountable to Aceh:

**Gender-related Lessons Learned by New Zealand NGOs from
the Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004**

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Photo: Anita Edgecombe

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Abstract

The Indian Ocean Boxing Day Tsunami of 2004 prompted a level of international disaster response that was unprecedented. In Aceh, Indonesia, the worst hit region, thousands of international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), including some New Zealand based NGOs, arrived in the area to carry out relief and reconstruction work. A common criticism of the international response is that it has resulted in the marginalisation of Acehnese women. The criticism comes despite at least fifteen years of gender mainstreaming into the policies and practices of development organisations and the widespread acceptance that attention to gender issues is essential for sustainable and equitable development. It also comes at a time when there is ever-increasing demand for NGO accountability to donors and beneficiaries and a recognition that NGOs should continuously be learning to improve future practice and ensure they are meeting their stated goals.

Post-tsunami Aceh posed a number of context-specific challenges to the implementation of gender policies, including the enormous extent of the devastation, the history of violent conflict and the rule of Sharia law. This research investigates the particular challenges and experiences workers of NZ-based NGOs faced in implementing their gender policies in the aftermath of the tsunami in Aceh, and how those NGOs responded to the challenges and experiences to ensure lessons have been learned. It also investigates whether any obstacles to learning lessons exist within those organisations.

Qualitative research is used including gathering primary data from semi-structured interviews with individuals from five NZ NGOs that worked in Aceh and with representatives of NGOs willing to comment on their organisational responses. Additional comments on the issues are also obtained from two NZAID (New Zealand Agency for International Development) staff. The findings show that while participants faced numerous gender-related challenges in their work in

Aceh, approximately three years after the tsunami none were able to point to any specific gender-related lessons learned. The findings also reveal that participating NGOs tend to draw learning from their international affiliates and from the NZ NGO community rather than having structured learning systems within their own organisations. A number of barriers to learning within organisations are also identified. These results, while not necessarily representative of the wider NZ NGO community, reveal the difficulties of trying to implement gender policies in a particular emergency context and contribute to an understanding of how NZ NGOs are involved in a process of continuous learning to incorporate their own experiences to ensure lessons are learned and improve their accountability.

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Chapter One

Introduction

The Indian Ocean Tsunami on 26 December 2004, and the earthquake that triggered it, killed approximately 275,000 people worldwide. 165,000 of those deaths were in Aceh, a semi-autonomous, strictly Islamic, region in Indonesia. It was the worst hit area of all seventeen countries affected by the tsunami. The losses and damage there were estimated to be US$4.5 million (Telford & Cosgrave, 2006). In addition to those who lost their lives in Aceh, a further 500,000 people were displaced from their homes (BRR, 2005) and 600,000 lost their livelihoods. The scale of the disaster was enormous but the international response that followed was unprecedented (Telford & Cosgrave, 2006). Over US$14 billion in funding was raised internationally.[1] Not only was that level of funding extraordinary, but so was the number of responding organisations. According to Schulze (2005), in Aceh alone over 3000 Indonesian and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) were registered to work in the early months after the tsunami.

Following the disaster, the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition (TEC), comprised of a number of donor countries and UN agencies, was established to evaluate the international response. The TEC, in its 'Joint Evaluation of the International Response to the Indian Ocean Tsunami', concluded that lessons have not been learned by INGOs from experience and that they failed to meet their commitments to basic humanitarian principles such as the Sphere Standards.[2] The TEC report goes so far as to allege: "at best, the international response restored the 'status quo ante'. At worst, it strengthened those who were better off and/or more articulate ... while marginalising those who had few assets, notably women and the most poor" (Telford & Cosgrave, 2006, p. 20).

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[1] Source: http://www.tsunami-evalutaion.org/
[2] Sphere, Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response developed in 2000, and discussed further on page 4.

Numerous other reports have emerged from academic institutions, NGOs, governments, UN bodies, and the women of Aceh themselves, that to varying degrees support the TEC findings and criticise the international response for its failure to address gender inequality, and actually succeed in further marginalising women in the reconstruction process.[3] These hefty criticisms come despite the fact that gender awareness has been of paramount importance in humanitarian and development circles since at least the early 1990s. By that time most development organisations had embraced gender mainstreaming (Longwe, 1999), a process whereby gender considerations are integrated systematically into all organisational policies and procedures.

A focus on gender is about recognising the various dynamics and power imbalances that exist between the genders and how those impact on things such as personal security, access to resources and participation in decision-making processes, particularly in the aftermath of a disaster. Consideration of gender issues is a crucial element of effective disaster response and longer-term development. Experience has shown that inattention to gender-related vulnerabilities and inequalities seriously threatens sustainable development. The power dynamics that exist between men and women, and the institutional, political, religious and social structures that underlie them, have to be addressed if INGOs are to achieve their stated goals of alleviating suffering, eradicating poverty, empowering the vulnerable and so on.

Just having gender policies is not enough however. Consistently, INGOs struggle to translate their gender policies into practice, especially in emergency contexts when the pressure is greatest, as was demonstrated most recently and markedly in the post-tsunami response in Aceh. No two emergency contexts are quite alike and there has been growing recognition that gender policies must be adaptable to different local contexts. To effectively address gender inequalities, organisations need to have regard to the cultural and social realities in which those inequalities have become embedded (Iddi, 1999). Aceh is characterised by a number of context-specific

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[3] See for example HRC (2005) and Eye on Aceh (2006).

factors that presented enormous challenges to the implementation of gender policies in the post-tsunami environment. These include:

- Its relative proximity to the earthquake that caused the tsunami. It therefore suffered extensive damage and loss of life. Even the most experienced INGOs were pushed to their limits to supply the required levels of aid. The urgency of post-disaster situations is often cited as a reason why organisations fail to take proper account of gender issues.[4]

- Aceh's history of violent conflict. Prior to the tsunami Aceh had experienced a long running and violent secessionist movement, and few international organisations were permitted to have a presence there. The people of Aceh were already poor and vulnerable and in many cases had suffered abuse at the hands of the Indonesian Army (HRC, 2005). Women are usually the most adversely impacted by conflict and insufficient attention was paid by INGOs to their needs as conflict victims (Umar, Ismail, Djalil, & Dewy, 2006).

- The rule of Sharia law. In 2005, about 6 months after the tsunami, Aceh, which for hundreds of years has been strongly Muslim, legislated for a stricter form of Islamic law. While Sharia law itself is considered to promote gender equality, women in Aceh allege that it is being interpreted and implemented by those in power in a way that is heavily discriminatory towards women.[5] It places restrictions on their freedom and their ability to participate fully in the reconstruction process.

The TEC noted a lack of awareness and understanding by INGOs in Aceh of the local context in which they were operating (Telford & Cosgrave, 2006). It is not surprising that the TEC has made renewed calls for a regulatory system

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[4] See for example Eye on Aceh (2006).
[5] Source: Discussions with representatives of local women's organisations in Aceh, January 2007.

for the international humanitarian community to be implemented so that the accountability of INGOs might be improved. It is not the first time such calls have been made. About ten years ago, in 1997, ALNAP (Active Learning Network for Humanitarian Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action)[6] was established following an evaluation of the crisis in Rwanda in 1994 where the international humanitarian community was also criticised for its response. ALNAP was established to improve the learning, accountability and performance of humanitarian organisations in emergencies. It was a response to calls for some kind of regulation of the humanitarian sector, which had up to that point been answerable to nobody. While INGOs shied away from regulation as such, there was a considerable level of commitment indicated by organisations to the Sphere Standards which were developed as agreed basic principles for organisations engaging in emergency responses (Buchanan-Smith, 2003).[7] Yet in post-tsunami Aceh, INGOs failed to adhere to those standards.

To be accountable, organisations need to be able to reflect on how they have performed in practice, and draw lessons that can then be translated into improved future performance. While many 'Lessons Learned' reports have been written,[8] the real test as to whether those lessons have in fact been learned rather than simply recorded then stored away somewhere with countless other documents, will come the next time organisations engage in a disaster response. Organisations need to commit time and resources to actively learning on an ongoing basis. They need to have systems in place to capture learning from the field and feed it back into policies and practices. The Indian Ocean Tsunami has once again exposed the apparent inability of INGOs to learn lessons. As Fowler (1997, p. 64) once stated: NGOs have a "limited capacity to learn, adapt and continuously improve the quality of what they do".

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[6] http://www.alnap.org/
[7] The Sphere Standards identify gender as a cross-cutting issue, which indicates its relevance and importance within all other aspects of humanitarian work.
[8] See for example UN (2005b).

<u>Research Questions</u>

A number of New Zealand (NZ) based NGOs, were involved in the tsunami response in Aceh. Consistent with the traditional approach of NZ NGOs, for the most part their contribution was limited to providing funding through their international affiliates and partners on the ground. However, seven of the seventeen organisations that participated in the tsunami response did send staff to work in Aceh. Given the criticisms that have emerged about the overall response, and particularly the issues around gender, the purpose of this case study is to reveal and analyse the experiences of a selection of NZ NGOs in Aceh and to find out how the NGOs have used those experiences to ensure lessons are being learned to improve future performance. It also seeks to identify any barriers to learning that might exist within organisations.

The research therefore asks:

1. What were the challenges and experiences faced by workers of NZ NGOs in the implementation of their gender policies while engaging in relief and reconstructions activities in post-tsunami Aceh?

2. How have the NGOs responded to those challenges and experiences to ensure lessons have been learned to improve future practice?

3. What, if any, obstacles exist to learning lessons within organisations?

Figure 1 below shows how this research draws on the three broad subject areas discussed above: gender and development, post-tsunami Aceh and organisational learning. The research questions focus on the middle triangle where the three circles overlap.

Figure 1: **Research Focus**

This research is important because the Indian Ocean Tsunami was a major event that tested INGOs considerably, and certainly tested their ability to implement their gender policies and adhere to agreed humanitarian standards around gender. Subsequent evaluations have revealed they fell short of those standards. In a climate where there are increasing demands for NGO accountability to both donors and beneficiaries, NGOs need to be able to demonstrate that they are in fact learning lessons from disasters such as the tsunami and are committing themselves to improving their performance. It is particularly important for NZ NGOs, as recent trends show they are expanding their capacity to be operational in humanitarian emergencies whereas traditionally they have been funding organisations only. This research provides a glimpse into how, and the extent to which, some NZ NGOs are engaged in a process of learning to improve their performance in light of the context-specific, gender-related individual experiences of a small selection of development professionals who worked in Aceh.

Thesis Structure

The remainder of this thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter Two is a review of the literature on the three broad subject areas covered in this research: gender and development; post-tsunami Aceh; and organisational learning. It discusses the importance of gender policies in post-disaster contexts, and identifies some of the reasons why there are persistent problems in implementing them in practice. A variety of reports on the tsunami response in Aceh are reviewed, which helps to describe the specific context in which this research is positioned. Finally, there is a review of the literature on organisational learning, which looks at how organisations learn lessons and identifies some of the barriers to learning.

Chapter Three provides some background information on Aceh and on the multiple impacts of the tsunami there. It describes in some detail a number of context-specific factors and explains how those directly and indirectly affected relief and reconstruction efforts, particularly in respect of gender issues. The chapter also briefly explains my personal positioning in this research based on a two month visit to Aceh from late 2006 to early 2007.

Chapter Four outlines the methodology used to undertake this study. It describes the qualitative nature of the research and identifies the various sources of information used. The chapter ends with a brief discussion of the ethical requirements and an acknowledgement of the limitations of the research.

Chapter Five presents my findings. For the most part the participants' own words have been used to describe their experiences. Responses are grouped according to themes along with analysis focussed on answering the three research questions.

Chapter Six provides concluding comments and tentative recommendations in light of the findings. It draws together the main points and identifies some potential areas for further research.

Chapter Two

What the Literature Says

<u>Introduction</u>

This research examines whether and how lessons have been learned about gender by a selection of NZ-based NGOs involved in the tsunami response in Aceh. It seeks to understand how NZ NGOs have learned lessons about gender from the field to ensure ongoing improvements in the quality of their disaster response and development work. The research deals with three distinct subjects areas: gender and development; the gender-related aspects of the tsunami response in Aceh; and organisational learning.

I begin with gender and development and provide only a broad overview of the development of thinking on that subject, and then focus on literature that deals with gender in post-disaster or post-conflict situations, as these are most relevant to the Aceh context and to the research questions. The literature that has emerged directly out of the international humanitarian response to the tsunami in Aceh is reviewed next. I have chosen a selection of reports that deal with gender-related aspects of the response, and only reports that in whole or part focus specifically on Aceh. The reports selected come from a variety of sources including academic institutions, NGOs, governments and UN bodies. The final section on organisational learning looks at how organisations learn lessons and translate those lessons into improved practice. The literature reviewed includes not only learning in development organisations but also in government bodies, as there are principles that apply more generally.

Gender and Development

Gender Mainstreaming

A review of gender and development literature shows the emergence of gender as a central theme of development in the last fifteen to twenty years. That is not to say that there was no gender awareness in the development context before that, but typically, gender considerations were a side issue, and any attention to gender primarily meant a focus on women. Early literature on women and development was predominantly concerned with the negative impacts of development on women (Staudt, 1997). To address those negative impacts, an approach known as Women in Development, or WID, emerged in the 1970s. WID sought to address the relative disadvantaged position of women by actively targeting them in development approaches. By the 1990s, WID had largely been replaced by GAD, or Gender and Development, as the dominant approach. The shift in approach represented a change in thinking about how to address gender inequality, from a focus on women to a focus on gender and the *relationship between women and men* (Iddi, 1999). Staudt (1997, p. 10; Umar et al., 2006) defines gender as "a *social construct that differentiates men and women in ways that become embedded and institutionalised in the political and bureaucratic authority of the state. Women rarely have a voice in conceptualising such institutional forms.*" The GAD approach sought to address gender inequality by trying to understand and transform those underlying power structures. This shift in approach required a change in the fundamental way that development organisations conceived of development and the way they operated, rather than simply adding a new dimension to their operations. As discussed further below, such changes have not been rapid or widespread and in fact in some cases, there has been no change at all.

A major strategy that emerged from the GAD approach was gender mainstreaming, that is, the incorporation of gender considerations into all aspects of policy and practice of development organisations. The last fifteen

or so years have seen a process of gender mainstreaming by humanitarian and development organisations (Longwe, 1999). But many authors suggest that for one reason or another, there is little reason to celebrate progress made. Recent literature suggests that the process of gender mainstreaming is not yet complete (Bazinet & Sequeira, 2006). Some authors argue that even the shift from WID to GAD has not been achieved (MacDonald, 2003) and there remains in some organisations an inability to shift the focus from women to gender. MacDonald, who analysed gender mainstreaming in the UK Department for International Development, considers the main barrier to mainstreaming gender is the lack of institutionalisation; that is, an absence of proper systems within organisations to ensure gender issues are considered at all levels.

Ensuring due consideration is given to gender from policy development to implementation and evaluation is imperative to the goal of addressing gender inequality. If it is not written into policy and procedure it is unlikely to have much impact in practice given all the other pressing concerns of development practice. On the other hand, simply writing it into policy is not going to translate into practice on the ground unless time and resources are invested in training staff to implement the policy. Similarly, unless frameworks are in place for gender to be an integral part of follow up monitoring and evaluation of development work, there is no way of knowing whether policies have been effective in achieving their stated goal.

Even though some authors say the shift from WID to GAD is incomplete, others consider there is already a waning of interest in gender issues. Jacquette and Staudt (2006) refer to this as "GAD fatigue". Others note a distinct loss of momentum in the drive to address gender inequality since the mid-1990s (Hunt, 2004). MacDonald (2003) observed a decrease in the level of resources allocated to gender equality. Such observations are concerning because as the understanding of gender and power structures that marginalise women increases, it appears organisations are lacking incentives or finding it too difficult to do anything about it. In theory authors agree gender mainstreaming is important, but in reality implementation is problematic.

Implementation

Literature written in the late 1990s and early in the 2000s started to recognise that while many organisations had gender policies, there were difficulties in implementing them (Longwe, 1999; Moser & Moser, 2005). Seeking to address underlying power structures is more complex than designing projects that target women, because not only do the respective needs, roles and interests of men and women need to be taken into account but also the underlying political, social and religious structures that cause and sustain inequality. Seeking to address gender is a more holistic approach than targeting women and therefore requires a much more significant investment of effort and resources at all levels. For many NGOs their size and budget constraints are likely barriers.

A number of reasons are suggested in the literature as to why implementation of gender policies remains problematic given the years of mainstreaming. One is that policies tend to be top-down and developed far removed from the realities of practice, by people who themselves have no field experience (Hilhorst, 2002; Hovland, 2003). The conflict between theorists and researchers and the actual needs of practitioners is one of the major debates identified in development literature (Jacquette & Summerfield, 2006). Another reason suggested is that staff are insufficiently trained to implement policies (Hunt, 2004; Porter & Smith, 1998) or the gender training they receive is not sufficiently adapted to the realities of a given situation (Porter & Smith, 1998; Rowan-Campbell, 1999). The urgency of post-disaster emergency situations is also commonly advanced as a reason why gender policies are not implemented in practice. Taking gender into account is sometimes considered to require too much effort that slows things down in an emergency (Cupples, 2007; Eye on Aceh, 2006). The literature provides plenty of reasons why successful implementation is problematic. Harder to find are concrete examples of what does work and how gender policies can be implemented successfully in a variety of circumstances.

It is difficult to find what does work because insufficient attention is paid by organisations to monitoring and evaluating their policies to assess their effectiveness in addressing gender inequality (Brambilla, 2001; Moser & Moser, 2005). A number of authors say there is no systematic assessment of the impact of gender policies and whether they achieve what they set out to achieve (Brambilla, 2001; Jahan, 1995; MacDonald, 2003). MacDonald noted there is little evidence to show how evaluations are followed up and fed back into policy/project design. It is not clear whether this is a gap in organisational practice or a gap in the literature.

Gender and Disaster

This thesis is concerned with gender in a specific context, that is, post-disaster and post-conflict in Aceh. A review of the disaster/conflict literature shows that the gendered dimensions of such phenomena are increasingly analysed, with a growing recognition of the need for organisations to respond with policies and practices that are not just sensitive to those dimensions but that have gender considerations at their heart. Policies that do not have proper regard to gender can be ineffective at best and even harmful to long-term development aims (Gell, 1999; Whitbread, 2005).

Attention needs to be paid, not just to the different needs of men and women in post-disaster/post-conflict contexts but also to the underlying causes of gender inequalities (Cupples, 2007; Abirafeh, 2005). This requires organisations to consider longer term, more strategic approaches to gender issues in their relief and development activities. It requires them to go beyond simply designing technical responses that meet women's immediate practical needs such as providing sanitary products in emergencies for example. Strategic needs relate more to women's relatively disadvantaged position in a given society and require a response that may be more political. The distinction between practical and strategic gender needs was first made by Molynuex (1985) and has since been adopted by many other authors as a way of conceptualising different levels of need and therefore the different

planning approaches required to address them (Moser, 1993; Ostergaard, 1992)

While there are difficulties in taking gender into account from the outset in any humanitarian response, Gell (1999) suggests there is also acknowledgement that gender issues cannot be ignored in emergency contexts. Unless attention is paid to gender considerations from the outset, through deliberate and targeted measures, valuable opportunities to ensure long term sustainability and peace can be lost (Zuckerman & Greenberg, 2005) and there is a risk of increased gender stereotyping that exacerbates existing inequalities (Pittaway et al, 2007). Abirafeh (2005, p. 10) describes a serious risk of a "retreat to conservative notions of masculinity and femininity".

However, one study that has analysed several post-conflict areas, provides evidence that gender ideologies are not easily shifted and that in post-conflict situations at least, there may be a limit to the extent to which it is possible to change power structures beyond the household level (El-Bushra & El-Karib, 2002).

> "Interventions aiming to take the opportunity of rapid change in conflict and post-conflict situations to encourage transformations in gender relations may therefore be unrealistic. Conflict may create space to make a redefinition of social relations possible, but in doing so it rearranges, adapts or reinforces patriarchal ideologies, rather than fundamentally changing them." (p. 10)

The findings of the study do not necessarily contradict what other authors are saying about the need to take advantage of post-disaster or post-conflict situations to address gender inequalities, but it does suggests some limitations to what is possible. Further studies of this nature would be useful for identifying whether the same is true in post-disaster situations and what other factors may be important.

The concept of gender differs throughout the world. The political, social and religious environments in which gender is conceived vary. So a 'one size fits all' approach is inadequate when it comes to gender policies. Policies need to be flexible enough to adapt to the realities of different situations (Kabeer, 1999). A gender policy developed in a head office in a Western country is unlikely to be relevant or applicable to all situations. Different places require different approaches that take into account the context specific factors. Gender policies for post-disaster situations may look quite different to policies for long-term development. Authors note that particular attention needs to be paid to gender dynamics as they emerge in different contexts (Abirafeh, 2005; Cupples, 2007).

Jacquette and Summerfield (2006) note there is very little literature that deals with how to address gender in 'increasingly violent and culturally politicised' contexts. We live in a world where emergencies are increasingly complex. Conflict and disaster in many places have become inextricably linked. So there is a constant challenge to relief and development organisations to develop and adapt gender policies that will be effective in new and more complex environments in which they operate. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee produced a 'Gender Handbook in Humanitarian Action' in 2006,[9] after the tsunami, which sets standards for the integration of gender issues from the outset of complex emergencies. The handbook emphasises that gender equality is not a luxury in that context; it is essential to sustainable development. While learning what the local gender related conditions are and adapting policies and practices to fit appropriately can take time, the handbook stresses that it is realistic and necessary to consider gender issues in an emergency situation.

Two risks of trying to ensure gender policies can be relevant in a variety of situations are apparent that are not comprehensively covered in the literature reviewed. First, there may be a risk that gender policies are deliberately kept broad and vague to try to ensure they can be relevant in any situation, which

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[9] Available online at: http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/gender.

is likely to render them ineffective and meaningless. Alternatively, policies might be so closely adapted to a local political or religious context that the fundamental goal of gender policy, which is the eradication of gender inequality, is not achievable.

Summary

The literature reviewed on gender and development and gender and disaster discusses the emergence of gender as a central theme in development practice. It offers some explanations as to why organisations struggle to implement gender policies in practice and it provides some understanding of the issues responding humanitarian organisations are faced with in their post-disaster responses. They are:

1. The need to recognise the gendered dimensions of disasters, that is, the ways in which a disaster impacts differently on men and women.

2. The need to appreciate the difference between immediate, practical gender needs and the complex, underlying gender dynamics or the longer term strategic gender needs, and respond accordingly.

3. The challenge to address gender from the outset even in the urgency of the relief phase.

4. The need to be realistic about the extent to which change is actually possible in a post-conflict situation.

5. The importance of understanding the local context and gender dynamics and be able to adapt gender policies to make them relevant and effective.

The Tsunami Response in Aceh

As would be expected after such a major event, numerous reports have emerged evaluating the international response to the Tsunami. The reports come from a variety of sources including NGOs that responded, independent non-profit organisations, governments, UN bodies such as UNDP, multilaterals like the World Bank, and the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition (TEC), an organisation set up to assess the tsunami response. The reports evaluate all aspects of the international response but this review looks at a selection of reports that have discussed gender issues and that deal specifically with Aceh.

Perhaps the most damning overall comment has come from the TEC Synthesis Report, which states, "at best, the international response restored the 'status quo ante'. At worst, it strengthened those who were better off and/or more articulate, such as fishermen who possessed boats, while marginalizing those who had few assets, notably women and the most poor" (Telford & Cosgrave, 2006, p. 20). In other words, according to the TEC, which is made up of a number of donor organisations from around the world, the result of the international tsunami response has been the very thing that organisations strive to counter in their humanitarian work, that is the marginalisation of the vulnerable.

The TEC Synthesis Report noted that one of the major weaknesses in the response was a poor understanding of local contexts, including the dynamics of the armed conflict in Aceh. Other reports echo this finding. The TEC concludes that few lessons have been learned from experience and that organisations did not meet their commitments to principles such as Sphere.[10] As a result, the TEC sees the need for better accountability and makes a clear call for a regulatory system for the international humanitarian community to be

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[10] The Sphere Standards were developed by the international humanitarian community in response to the Rwanda Crisis, in an effort to improve the quality of humanitarian engagement.

put in place. Regulation has been an ongoing debate in the international development community since the mid to late 1990s, following the last major failure of the international humanitarian community in the Rwanda crisis.

All of the reports reviewed (except perhaps an Oxfam Report, discussed further below, called 'The Tsunami's Impact on Women' 2005, written just a few months after the tsunami, and focusing on the gendered impacts of the tsunami rather than on the humanitarian response) are united in their criticism of the international humanitarian organisation response with regard to gender issues. The reports point to many of the same problems identified in the gender and development literature reviewed above. They criticise both INGOs and the Indonesian government for failing to actively include women or take account of women's particular needs in their activities both in the relief and subsequent reconstruction phases (See for example: Schulze, 2005; Eye On Aceh, 2006). The Badan Pelaksana Rehabilitasi dan Rekonstruksi (BRR), the Indonesian government agency charged with coordinating the reconstruction of Aceh, did eventually develop its own gender policy in September 2006 and set up a Gender Working Group in recognition of the gendered impacts of the tsunami and in response to criticisms about its lack of attention to women.

Relief

Most reports observe that, as with all disasters, the tsunami had gender specific impacts. Perhaps most notably, in some parts of Aceh women accounted for over 75% of deaths (Oxfam, 2005). One of the immediate effects of this was that men had to take over domestic roles not familiar to them and other women had to shoulder more of the domestic work. A longer term gender impact of the disproportionate number of deaths of women was that remaining women were forced into marriages at younger ages, resulting in more pregnancies and fewer girls attending school, thereby depriving them of education and limiting their future options (Oxfam, 2005). The immediate practical needs of men and women differ in disaster situations. Several reports criticise that women's practical needs such as personal hygiene

requirements, nutrition for breastfeeding and so on, were not met in the early aftermath of the tsunami by either the Indonesian government or by INGOs (HRC, 2005; Umar et al., 2006). The report by Umar et al (2006) was the result of a survey carried out in Aceh. Comprehensive information was collected from a variety of sources including reports, focus group discussions, observations and interviews with tsunami survivors. The criticisms contained in that and other reports are significant because, as discussed above, the gendered impacts of disasters have been well understood by relief and development organisations for some time.

Pre-existing vulnerabilities contributed to the gender related impacts of the tsunami (Telford & Cosgrave, 2006). Women in Aceh were already one of the most vulnerable groups in society. Due in large part to decades of civil conflict, they were affected by poverty, fear, loss of male family members, and many had been victims of abuse (HRC, 2005). It is widely recognised that pre-existing vulnerabilities act as constraints in emergency situations making it harder for people to access assistance and assert their rights. For women in Aceh, this was further exacerbated by the prevailing attitude of the religious leaders that the tsunami was a punishment from God against women for their immoral behaviour (Umar et al., 2006). This interpretation of the disaster gained popularity, resulting in the official implementation of Sharia law about six months after the tsunami. The strict enforcement of the religious law has resulted in additional restrictions being placed on women leading to their further marginalisation and exclusion from the reconstruction process.

The temporary accommodation arrangements for people displaced from their homes have been heavily criticised for not meeting either women's practical needs nor their longer term, more strategic needs. Practically, the accommodation (which initially consisted of tents and later were barrack-like buildings) was not safe for women. They were out-numbered by men, there was a lack of safe and private washing facilities and there was inadequate lighting at night. Numerous reports point to these factors as contributing to an increase in violence against women, including sexual harassment (Umar et al., 2006). As a result, women became further marginalised because they did

not feel safe and their psychological and emotional wellbeing was negatively impacted, hindering their ability to be productive.

Reconstruction

As a situation moves along the messy and seldom clear-cut progression from emergency relief to the reconstruction phase, gender concerns become less about immediate practical needs and more about longer term strategic needs. As discussed above however, failure to take account of practical needs from the outset can result in strategic needs being harder to meet.

In respect of more strategic and longer term needs, camps were often geographically isolated, far from work opportunities and chances to participate in decision making processes (Eye on Aceh, 2006; HRC, 2005). Women were not consulted, and were seen as vulnerable victims rather than active participants (Umar et al., 2006). Several reports say that women's participation was not taken seriously and that international organisations failed to ensure their active participation (Telford & Cosgrave, 2006). In my own discussions with representatives of local Acehnese women's organisations in January 2007, the same concerns were expressed. In their experience, international organisations had gender policies but little was actually being done to implement them and women were not being given opportunities to participate.

Most reports observe the lack of participation by women in the reconstruction process in Aceh. The reasons include:

- INGOs seeing full consultation as taking too long (Eye on Aceh, 2006).
- Women living in isolated barracks at distance from where decisions are being made (Eye on Aceh, 2006).
- Women being seen as passive victims by INGOs rather than active participants (Eye on Aceh, 2006; Oxfam, 2005).

- Sharia law restricting women's ability to claim their human rights (HRC, 2005).

- Early marriages at young ages drawing girls out of school, depriving them of education and therefore better opportunities to participate (Oxfam, 2005).

- A lack of women's representation generally in local government and village leadership structures (BRR, 2006; Eye on Aceh, 2006).

- INGO workers had little or no knowledge of the local context (Telford & Cosgrave, 2006; UN, 2005a) and their organisational gender policies were inappropriate to the local context (Houghton, 2005).

- A lack of gender disaggregated data and other analytical methods that prevented INGOs from identifying gender related issues (Houghton, 2005; Oxfam, 2005).

- A lack of respect by INGOs for existing standards such as Sphere (Telford & Cosgrave, 2006; UN, 2005b).

- Economic assistance programmes that focussed primarily on men (Asia Foundation, 2006). Eye on Aceh (2006) reported that women did receive some livelihood assistance but that it was for activities such as baking and sewing which did not generate much income and risked having the effect of confining women to their pre-tsunami status. There was also a lack of opportunities for women to undertake training that might help improve their employment prospects in the future.

The UN reports referred to above came out of workshops held in Medan and Jakarta to examine lessons learned. The workshops and subsequent reports provide important insights because they were timely (within the first year of the tsunami) and they involved organisations that participated in the response and therefore were in a good position to comment on problems and lessons learned. On the other hand, reports prepared by independent NGOs who were not themselves part of the response, such as Eye on Aceh, have value because they come from a more impartial perspective.

It is notable that most of the reports reviewed focus on women in their evaluation of the tsunami response in respect of gender issues. This probably reflects the reality that women were more marginalised in that particular context as is generally the case in disaster aftermaths, but perhaps also reflects the tendency observed in the literature to continue focussing on women rather than on gender.

Summary

INGOs failed to effectively implement their gender policies and adhere to recognised standards in respect of gender in both the relief and reconstruction phases in Aceh post-tsunami. Women were not actively included in the reconstruction process and their numerous vulnerabilities due to prevailing physical, social and religious conditions were not fully appreciated by responding INGOs.

Organisational Learning

Given the TEC's criticism that the international humanitarian community has failed to learn important lessons, it is useful to understand how in fact organisations can and do learn. Many authors who write about how organisations learn lessons that translate into improved practice refer to 'learning organisations'. James Taylor (1998, p. 1), Director of Community Development Resource Association in South Africa (CDRA) defined a learning organisation as an "organisation which builds and improves its own practice by consciously and continually devising and developing the means to draw learning from its own (and others') experience." Taylor's definition is useful because it incorporates some key ingredients of effective learning that are widely recognised in the literature. It includes the idea of improvement: the purpose of learning is to get better at doing something. It talks about learning being a conscious thing, which implies that organisations have to actively learn and this involves an understanding of when and how learning occurs.

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The definition also sees learning as a continuous process, not a one-off activity. And finally, it explicitly states that learning is drawn from experience, both an organisation's own and others'. This is important because there is not a lot of evidence in the literature to show that organisations draw on practice to learn lessons and inform policy, as will be discussed below.

Improvement Through Learning

Authors agree that learning is evidenced by improved practice (Birkland, 2006; Pasteur, 2004; Taylor, 1998). Pasteur's (2004) review of the literature on organisational learning showed that learning by an organisation involves the *transformation* of knowledge into improved practice, not just a *transfer* of knowledge. Birkland (2006) wrote about policy change after catastrophic events, whether it occurs and to what extent. While he focussed on policy change at a state level rather than an NGO level, some of his observations and findings are relevant to the NGO sector. Birkland has developed a model of 'Event Related Policy Learning' (2006, p. 18). He notes that 'increased agenda attention' occurs after major events such as catastrophes, but that in itself does not necessarily lead to actual learning. Birkland suggests that 'direct learning' occurs where policy is changed on the basis of what is learned from a disaster. But he notes that the literature on policy change warns against attributing change to one particular cause. He also discusses the difficulty in measuring learning or showing that it has actually occurred.

Learning as a Continuous Process

In reality, organisations cannot learn. It is the individuals that make up the organisations that learn (Taylor, 1998). Organisational learning is a continuous, cumulative process of improvement, not just a one-off thing that happens at the end of a given project that can be 'ticked off' as having been achieved (Hilhorst, 2002; Ramalingam, 2005). This raises issues of knowledge management within organisations. Ramalingam (2005) studied a

variety of organisational initiatives related to knowledge strategies to examine the links between policy and practice and cautions that in reality organisations face resource constraints, and the drive for continuous improvement should be done in a way that is, among other things, measurable, realistic and appropriate to the particular organisation.

There is a tendency for development organisations to confine learning to the monitoring and evaluation phase of their work rather than constantly feeding back information to improve ongoing practice (Hovland, 2003). As discussed in the review of the literature on gender and development above, organisations are not giving sufficient attention to evaluating gender policies in the monitoring and evaluation phase in any event. The importance of continuous learning is consistent with the literature that requires gender policies to be adaptable to local contexts because adaptability involves ongoing learning as policies are being implemented, not waiting until the evaluation phase some time down the track.

How Learning Occurs

Taylor's (1998) definition of learning organisations suggests learning is a conscious and active process that requires an understanding by organisations of how they learn and an awareness that learning is drawn from experiences. The Overseas Development Institute (ODI) initiated a Bridging Research and Policy Project to examine the relationship between development research, policy and practice with a view to promoting evidence-based development policy. Hovland (2003) prepared a paper as part of the project that was an annotated bibliography of the literature on organisational learning as it relates to development organisations. She identified a gap in the literature regarding how institutions apply knowledge and learning. Rowan-Campbell (1999) also observed a lack of application by organisations of lessons learned.

Power, Maury and Murray (2002) agree there is limited understanding about how organisations learn but they stress that organisations need to learn how

they learn in order to be effective at it. Hailey and James (2002), who conducted a study of South Asian NGOs, concluded organisational learning depends to a large extent on the attitude of the leader and the organisational culture they therefore create. They say too that informal processes alone are not enough; formal training and good systems are required for successful learning. Learning is something that requires organisations to work hard at.

Learning and Policy Change

Buchanan-Smith (2003, p. vi), another contributing author to the ODI Project, undertook a case study of the Sphere Project. She speaks of an "unprecedented window of opportunity" and observes that the humanitarian system is "most responsive to change under pressure, when the push factors are strong". A number of authors have written about how following that event, international humanitarian organisations engaged in a process of self-reflection with a view to improving future performance.[11] Birkland also writes that policy change and learning occur more rapidly following a disaster. Buchanan-Smith concluded that a good relationship between researchers and policy makers, and a high level of inclusiveness were two of the main reasons why the development of Sphere Standards was successful in terms of the level of buy-in by NGOs after the Rwanda crisis.

On the other hand, David Mosse (2004), a development anthropologist based at the University of London, considers that too much emphasis is placed on the relationship between research and policy and not enough attention is paid to the relationship between policy and practice. This is consistent with MacDonald's (2003) finding that there is a lack of evidence to show how evaluations are fed back in to policy design and Hovland's (2003) observation that there is a gap in the literature in this respect. Mosse comments that "rapid policy change which has little regard for the institutions and relationships involved in the practice of development is a worrying characteristic of aid

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[11] See also Hilhorst (2002).

agencies today" (Mosse, 2004, p. 661). Mosse's concern is that NGOs are changing their policies faster than the life of the programme, which means they are operating in a reactive and perhaps ad hoc way. He worries such behaviour is more about preserving themselves rather than actually learning, consistent with Power et al (2002). Mosse's cautions are a counter to much of the literature on gender and development that calls for adaptability of policies based on experience on a continuous basis.

Barriers to Learning

Fowler (1997, p. 64) refers to NGOs as having a "limited capacity to learn, adapt and continuously improve the quality of what they do." Taylor (1998) asks why the same mistakes are made over and over again by organisations. In answer he suggests that there is often an imbalance between action and reflection within organisations and that there is a perception that getting it wrong amounts to failure and reflects badly on performance. Power et al (2002) point to a lack of feedback loops that allow for bottom-up learning and accountability. Often there are extensive evaluations done that result in reports that sit on a shelf somewhere rather than being fed back into learning systems. Hailey and James (2002) suggest other reasons why organisations struggle to learn, including: competition for funds between organisations and departmental rivalries within them; an unwillingness to apply limited funds to intangible things like learning; and an unwillingness by individuals to embrace new ideas and change their behaviour. Finally, rapid staff turnover that is characteristic of the humanitarian aid sector, results in organisations placing little emphasis on learning (Richardson, 2006).

Summary

Organisations improve their performance by actively learning lessons. Those lessons are drawn from the organisation's own, and others' experience. Learning is an ongoing process that requires structured systems in addition to

informal processes. A number of barriers to learning within organisations are identified above that provide some explanation as to why organisations continue to make the same mistakes.

Conclusion

A review of the literature shows the emergence of gender concerns in the development context and specifically in post-conflict/post-disaster situations. It is clear that the progression from a focus on the disadvantaged position of women to a focus on gender dynamics and power imbalances has not been smooth and the WID/GAD conflict is ongoing. A number of difficulties remain, particularly in respect of implementing gender policies. Reasons for these difficulties include:

- Insufficient training of staff to implement policies.

- The failure of policies to be relevant to local situations and a lack of understanding of the local context by those trying to implement them.

- The urgency of the emergency resulting in less time and resources to focus on gender.

Some authors point to GAD fatigue and a loss of momentum on gender concerns, which may also explain in part why gender considerations are easily sidelined in emergency responses.

The evaluation of the international humanitarian response to the tsunami in Aceh appears consistent with the literature on gender and development and the difficulties identified by it. Evaluation reports reveal the international community fell short of its own standards in its response. Many reports concluded that major lessons have not been learned since the last big

international response in Rwanda following which the international community was forced to self reflect and find ways to improve its performance. Consequently, there have been renewed calls for regulation of the humanitarian community (Telford & Cosgrave, 2006). Learning goes hand in hand with accountability and the literature records increasing calls for accountability of humanitarian organisations to the recipients of assistance (Buchanan-Smith, 2003; Eltahawy, 2006; Hilhorst, 2002), not only to their donors but to other stakeholders including beneficiaries. Where previously there had been a culture of unquestioning acceptance of humanitarian work, after the response in Rwanda, the international humanitarian community came under intense scrutiny.

The review of the literature on organisational learning looks at how organisations learn lessons and incorporate that learning back into their policies and procedures to ensure ongoing, continuous improvement and it states that learning requires formal systems and leadership commitment and is an active and ongoing process. The best opportunities for learning lie in the wake of a major catastrophe, but organisations should be learning continually. There is debate between authors about the appropriateness and speed of policy change in response to what happens in practice. There is also a gap identified in the literature concerning how organisations learn from evaluations and subsequently apply such lessons.

The literature reviewed has highlighted the issues integral to this research. It demonstrates the importance of having regard to gender issues as part of a disaster response, and through the reports on Aceh, shows what can happen when insufficient attention is paid to gender issues in a given context. Organisational learning is critical given the hefty criticisms and observations that INGOs are not learning and are repeating their mistakes. This research picks up on these issues and looks at how NZ NGOs have engaged in a process of learning lessons, against the backdrop of gender issues in the post-tsunami response in Aceh. The next chapter provides some further contextual information on Aceh and the impact of the tsunami there to describe the environment in which NZ NGOs were working.

Chapter Three

Aceh

Introduction

Wherever disasters hit there are a range of local, context-specific realities that will necessarily determine the extent of the disaster but also impact on the subsequent relief and reconstruction activities. This chapter provides some background information about Aceh and the tsunami. It describes some of the context-specific realities that made Aceh the worst tsunami-affected region and that posed challenges to INGOs that responded to the disaster.

The chapter begins with a brief account of my own experience in Aceh that stimulated my interest in the topic for this thesis. I then provide some general information about the tsunami and particularly its impact in Aceh. Next, I discuss three main context-specific factors that I suggest posed significant challenges to INGOs carrying out humanitarian relief and reconstruction work: the sheer scale of the disaster; the pre-existing civil conflict; and the strict implementation of Sharia law. Those factors necessarily involve gender issues and affected the ability of INGOs to operate in a gender sensitive way. They are context specific factors that should have been taken into account by organisations when trying to implement gender policies as part of relief and reconstruction work. The chapter ends with a discussion on the ongoing vulnerability of women in Aceh and the work of local women's organisations.
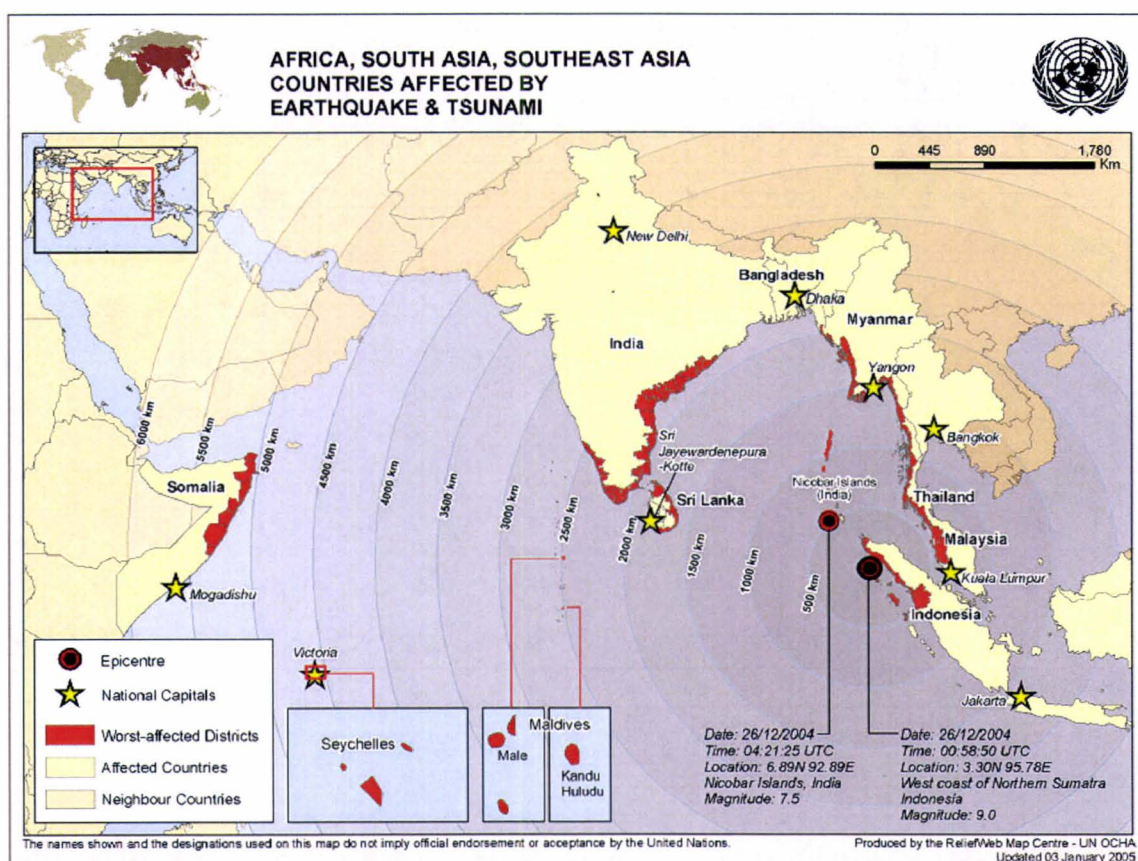
Personal Experience

In addition to official reports and newspaper articles, much of this background information comes from my own observations and casual conversations from a visit to Aceh between December 2006 and February 2007. I went to Aceh to do volunteer community development work through an NZ-based NGO that

had partnered with a local organisation. Living and working in a village about 30 kilometres from the provincial capital of Banda Aceh, I experienced first hand some of the challenges of working in that particular context. Those challenges included trying to work in a gender sensitive and gender inclusive way. My observations were that women were noticeably less visible in community life. Leisure activities, such as volleyball and socialising at the local coffee shop, for example, were geared towards men. It was difficult to engage with women directly, partly because of their apparent lack of presence, but it was also difficult to arrange times to meet with them because of their heavy domestic responsibilities. My own lack of knowledge of the local language and the short-term nature of my visit meant I relied heavily on the local staff to facilitate and translate. The local staff members were predominantly male, which I felt created an additional barrier to working with the local women. I became interested in gender issues in the Aceh post-tsunami reconstruction context and how NGOs were dealing with those issues.

During my visit, I was privileged to have the opportunity to speak with a number of Acehnese people about their experiences of the conflict and the tsunami. I met with representatives of some local women's organisations in Banda Aceh who spoke with me about their work. I talked with women in surrounding villages about their experiences when the waves hit and of the years they spent as victims in a violent conflict. Some of their comments and stories have been included in discussion of the wider issues below. I have paraphrased what they said and kept them anonymous. Mostly we communicated through interpreters or in broken English, so I cannot guarantee 100% accuracy. I recognise that that while this thesis is concerned with gender issues, the information I personally gleaned focuses mainly on the experiences of women. I witnessed an interview with one male village headman who was an ex-freedom fighter, but for the most part the conversations I participated in about people's personal experiences were with women. This should be kept in mind when considering my analysis.

The Tsunami

The Indian Ocean Tsunami on 26 December 2004 killed 275,000 people in fourteen countries and directly affected two million people.[12] The map below shows the areas affected by the tsunami and the location of the earthquake that triggered it.

Available at http://www.esri.com/news/arcnews/spring05article/gis-supports.htm

Nearly 90% of the victims lived in Aceh or Sri Lanka (Le Billon & Waizenegger, 2007). In all areas affected by the tsunami, 80% of those killed were women (Umar et al., 2006). There are two main reasons for the high proportion of female deaths: sex and gender. In respect of sex, men are physically stronger and therefore more able to hold on to fixed structures to resist being swept away. In respect of gender, men are more likely to be able

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[12] Source: http://www.tsunami-evaluation.org.

to swim, tend not to have childcare responsibilities, and wear less restrictive clothing (Cosgrave, 2007).

Aceh

Aceh is a semi-autonomous region on the northern most tip of the Indonesian island of Sumatra. Its location, right by the epicentre of the earthquake, made it the worst tsunami-affected area in the Indian Ocean (Telford & Cosgrave, 2006). The under-sea earthquake was centred 150 km off the coast of Aceh and measured 9.0 on the Richter scale. It occurred at 7:50 am local time and caused extensive damage. The first of two or three resulting waves,[13] up to twenty metres in height, hit Aceh about forty five minutes later (BRR, 2005). Over 165,000 people were killed in Aceh (BRR, 2005), which was approximately 4% of the population and accounts for well over half the overall death toll world wide from the tsunami. A further 500,000 people were displaced from their homes (BRR, 2005). Banda Aceh, the provincial capital situated on the coast, suffered extensive damage to buildings and lost 20% of all local government staff.[14] The Indonesian military, which had a strong presence in Aceh, also suffered heavy losses (Cosgrave, 2007).

Two thirds of Aceh's population of 4.2 million were affected in some way by the tsunami (Le Billon & Waizenegger, 2007). Apart from the heavy death toll, some 800 kilometres of coastline was destroyed, including ports and harbours, fish farms and mangroves. High levels of soil salinity and debris rendered large areas of land useless for farming. Some land was permanently lost to the sea. Major roads, bridges and entire villages were wiped out, leaving many areas isolated. Communications infrastructure was destroyed, which meant it took some time for details to emerge of the extent of the devastation. 600,000 people in Aceh lost their livelihoods.[15]

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[13] I spoke with the headman of a village that was all but destroyed by the tsunami. He spoke of three separate waves. Others speak of just two waves.
[14] Source: http://www.e-aceh-nias.org.
[15] See http://www.tsunami-evaluation.org.

Proximity was only one of the reasons for the severe impact of the tsunami on Aceh. As mentioned above, there were other factors that compounded the disaster including three main factors particular to Aceh that posed context-specific challenges to relief and reconstruction efforts by INGOs and ultimately to their ability to operate in a gender sensitive way or effectively implement their gender policies. They are: the sheer scale of disaster and consequent level of international response; the pre-existing civil conflict; and the religious environment.

Scale of Disaster and Influx of NGOs

The scale of the disaster in Aceh led to an unprecedented international response in terms of the mobilisation of funds and resources (Telford & Cosgrave, 2006). Over US$14 billion was raised internationally. That amounts to an average of US$7,000 per affected person.[16] According to Schulze (2005), in Aceh alone over 3000 Indonesian NGOs and INGOs were registered as working immediately post-tsunami. Coordination was a major challenge because of the sheer number of actors involved. In addition, Aceh's semi-autonomous status led to some confusion in the initial post-disaster period about where authority lay for the coordination of emergency response. The level of international funding and the number of NGOs in the area seeking to disburse those funds quickly to satisfy donors led to a significant level of competition between organisations, which resulted in duplication and waste (Telford & Cosgrave, 2006).[17]

During a visit I made to an Indonesian NGO in Banda Aceh, one of their international partners was there running a capacity building session on beneficiary accountability. They identified the enormous pressure to spend money quickly in such an environment as one of the reasons why it was so difficult to be accountable to beneficiaries. In this context, the challenge for NGOs to operate in a gender sensitive way was only one of many. The

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[16] Source: http://www.tsunami-evaluation.org.
[17] Comments to this effect were also made by several INGO workers I spoke with in Aceh.

evidence suggests that the level of urgency in delivering aid and relief amidst the chaos and devastation resulted in gender concerns being sidelined in the early stages of disaster response (Umar et al., 2006). The process of engaging women through consultation was seen by many organisations as taking too long (Eye on Aceh, 2006).

The combination of the extent of the disaster and the large number of actors competing to deliver aid made it difficult for INGOs to pay proper attention to gender issues and, as has been suggested above, resulted in a lack of accountability to beneficiaries.

Aceh's Conflict

Apart from its proximity, another reason Aceh was so badly impacted by the tsunami was that it had already experienced thirty years of violent conflict with GAM (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka), the Free Aceh Movement fighting against the Indonesian army (TNI) for independence. The effect of the conflict was two-fold. First, it meant that there were pre-existing vulnerabilities that exacerbated the tsunami's impact. Second, it made subsequent relief efforts that much more complex because of the existing tensions and the underlying complex needs of a society emerging from years of conflict. These are discussed in more detail below, after a brief overview of the history of the conflict.

History of Conflict

Conflict in Aceh goes back beyond the last thirty years. In 1873 the Dutch invaded the region and tried to conquer it. Aceh resisted and was embroiled in warfare for three decades. The Acehnese people do not accept the Dutch ever fully gained control. Even after the Dutch left, throughout the mid-1900s there were several rebellions because Aceh was dissatisfied with the way it was being treated by the Indonesian government. The Acehnese people

considered their rich natural resources were being exploited but they were seeing little of the revenue generated. Attempts to negotiate solutions often failed because people in Aceh felt the central government continuously did not uphold its side of any bargains made.[18]

The most recent conflict began in 1976 when GAM was formed in a renewed attempt to attain independence. Sometimes it was suppressed by military action of the Indonesian government. At other times negotiations between the two sides, occasionally with third parties involved, went some way to help ease tensions. In 2001, the central government passed a Special Autonomy Law that gave Aceh a certain amount of self-rule. This did not resolve the conflict however and violent clashes continued. Another peace process, supported internationally, broke down in 2003, and martial law was declared. At that point, the few INGOs that were working in Aceh were forced out.

A ceasefire was declared within days of the tsunami in 2004 as both sides turned their attention to relief efforts. Recognising an opportunity, efforts to secure a new peace deal were stepped up and so far have been successful. The enormous influx of international organisations and media is credited to some extent with preventing a return to conflict. The latest peace agreement was signed on 15 August 2005, some eight months after the tsunami, and so far, although there have been minor clashes (Burke & Afnan, 2005), it has held. However, a recent report by the International Crisis Group (2007) warns of a return to conflict, with many issues still unresolved and dissatisfaction among the Acehnese population with their newly elected officials.

Many Acehnese people see the tsunami as being responsible for ending the thirty-year conflict. Most of the people I spoke with held this view and referred to the tsunami as being "a gift from God" for that reason.[19] Nevertheless, there is evidence to suggest a peace process was well on its way before the tsunami hit (Braud & Grevi, 2005). Le Billon and Waizenegger (2007) though,

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[18] For more information on the history of conflict in Aceh see: Reid (2006) and Barber (2000).
[19] The religious explanation for the tsunami is widespread. One group of people I spoke with talked about three separate waves, the last one being clear fresh water, not salt water. The people interpreted this as being a "cleansing wave" sent by Allah.

who have compared Sri Lanka to Aceh in terms of the impact of the tsunami on the respective conflicts, say that without the tsunami sustainable peace would have been significantly less likely.

Pre-existing Vulnerabilities

As a result of the long history of violence and unrest, Aceh was vulnerable on numerous fronts. The infrastructure was already weakened, damaged and in a state of disrepair. Few existing structures were able to withstand the force of the waves. The local government was also weak, corruption levels were high and there was a lack of public confidence in the government. The economy had suffered and people were generally poor. In addition, there were already internally displaced persons (IDPs) as a result of the conflict. As at June 2003, an estimated 48,262 people had been displaced from their homes (Burke & Afnan, 2005). However, a World Bank Village Survey conducted three years later in 2006 recorded that 103,453 households had been displaced by the conflict.[20] Additionally, there were victims of violence. Numerous reports have documented the abuses suffered by men and women at the hands of *combatants and government soldiers (Good, DelVecchio Good, Grayman, & Lakoma,* 2006). One young woman I talked to described how TNI soldiers forced their way into her house at night because they suspected male members of her family were GAM fighters. They used their weapons to hit her brother in the head, causing it to bleed. They pulled open the tops of her and her sisters' clothing. Many reports show that women were the victims of gender-based violence and there are allegations the TNI used the rape of women as a weapon of war (Eye on Aceh, 2004; UNFPA, 2005). One way the tsunami exacerbated the impact of those abuses is that, according to local police, all documentation recording cases of violence against women were destroyed by the tsunami (UNFPA, 2005), thereby putting access to justice for the crimes committed against them further out of reach.

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[20] This information was obtained at a presentation I attended at the World Bank office in Banda Aceh, on 26 January 2007.

Acehnese society was fractured and people were already traumatised and vulnerable. During the conflict men were absent from their homes for years at a time while they fought government forces. I listened to one man describe how he spent seven years in the hills, away from his family. This made women more vulnerable and placed additional pressure on them. They had to take on men's traditional roles, undertake employment outside the home and support their families. The conflict was responsible for the deaths of some 15,000 people (BRR, 2005), mostly men. This resulted in numerous female-headed households. As it happened, the tsunami killed more women than men, thereby restoring gender balance in terms of overall numbers.[21] But it also caused another change in gender roles as men suddenly found themselves raising children without wives and being responsible for totally unfamiliar domestic duties.

Impact of Conflict on Relief Efforts

The history of conflict not only compounded the impact of the tsunami but also hampered to some extent subsequent relief efforts. One reason was that for some years Aceh had been all but closed off to outsiders, including NGOs. This meant that NGOs had little or no context-specific knowledge and experience of the area. Their understanding of pre-existing social conditions, conflict dynamics and gender relations was limited or non-existent.

Conflict, or the threat of it, placed some restrictions on INGOs in carrying out relief and reconstruction work. There were reports that due to some outbreaks of fighting INGOs were prevented from accessing some areas (Burke & Afnan, 2005). There was also a risk of pre-existing tensions being exacerbated by perceived unequal distribution of aid and resources. There is some evidence to show that conflict IDPs were not receiving the same benefits as tsunami IDPs and were being left behind in relief efforts.[22]

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[21] Data obtained during a visit to the UNORC Office in Banda Aceh in January 2007.
[22] World Bank presentation. See footnote 20 above.

On another level, the transition from conflict to peace meant that INGOs were simultaneously engaged in disaster relief and post-conflict reconstruction activities, or at least were carrying out relief in a post-conflict environment, which presents additional challenges that complicated the aid relief and reconstruction efforts (HRC, 2005). INGOs were dealing with both conflict and tsunami victims. In effect, the conflict was responsible for an additional layer of complex issues to be negotiated as INGOs responded to the tsunami. An additional layer of dynamics was operating that INGOs needed to be aware of to be effective. For example, there was a whole generation of young men, ex-combatants who were suddenly unoccupied, who needed to be reintegrated into society and the workforce. It was observed by Burke and Afnan (2005) in their study of organisations working in the post conflict environment in Aceh, that the most effective responses were those where the organisations adapted their activities to the conflict context. But they found that most organisations had not done that.

Sharia Law

Another factor that adds to the complexity for INGOs of working in Aceh is its political/religious status. As discussed above, INGOs were operating in an insecure political environment. But closely related to that is the rule of Sharia law in the region. Aceh has been strongly Islamic for hundreds of years and Islam is central to Acehnese identity (International Crisis Group, 2006). As part of Aceh's special status as a semi-autonomous region, in 2001 the central government gave permission for Aceh to partially implement Sharia. In 2003 it was formally introduced and Sharia courts were opened. Since then it has become more strictly enforced over time, with special Sharia police being established about a year before the tsunami.

Sharia law is strictly implemented and it reinforces male domination and power structures.[23] The way Sharia is enforced in Aceh discriminates against women and imposes restrictions on them that can make it difficult for INGOs to freely operate in accordance with their gender policies. INGOs are working against religious and cultural norms because there are rules about who women can interact with and when. Those existing norms also mean women are not well represented in leadership positions and are generally not part of decision-making processes (Eye on Aceh, 2006; HRC, 2005). This makes it more difficult for INGOs to seek out and consult with women in accordance with their policies.

The implementation of Sharia has prevented women being able to claim their rights in respect of land.[24] It prevents women from being able to freely report crimes committed against them, especially sex crimes, because of the negative inferences drawn about their own role and moral behaviour, and the prevailing male domination means often little is done about any reports that are made. Women I spoke to told me that Sharia itself is not discriminatory against women, but the way it is being implemented by those in power is. "Syari'a upholds equality for women. It's the implementation that's at fault."[25]

Following the tsunami, the interpretation that prevailed among religious leaders was that the tsunami was sent by God as punishment for the sins of the women of Aceh (Meo, 2005; Umar et al., 2006). This provided an excuse for implementing Sharia even more strictly. The women I met were all of the view the tsunami had been sent by God, not as punishment, but rather a gift from God to end the years of conflict and suffering. Several young village women told me that life is better for them since the tsunami. They had suffered abuse during the conflict and their personal security and freedom of movement was restricted by curfews. They now have more freedom of movement and access to material possessions not previously available to

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[23] According to the leader of a local women's NGO in Banda Aceh that I spoke with in February 2007.

[24] According to a representative of another local women's NGO in Banda Aceh that I spoke with in February 2007.

[25] Rosmawardani (an Aceh-born law graduate) quoted in: Anonymous (2006, p. 16).

them. However, other evidence suggests that since the tsunami, the vulnerability of Acehnese women has in fact increased and this is discussed below.

The strict interpretation and implementation of Sharia law impacted on the ability of INGOs to implement their gender policies because it created additional barriers to organisations seeking to include women. The overall erosion of the status of women by Sharia law required special consideration by INGOs if they wanted to address gender issues meaningfully in post-tsunami Aceh.

Women's Ongoing Vulnerability and the Work of Local Organisations

In discussions with representatives of local women's organisations I became aware of the general view that Acehnese women had been marginalised in the reconstruction process. I was told that women were rarely involved in decision-making and that although INGOs had gender policies they were not doing enough to actively implement them. Women were seldom being given the opportunity to be directly and actively involved.

Apart from being marginalised by INGOs in the reconstruction process, women are marginalised as a result of other factors too. For example, they continue to be victims of violence even though the conflict has ceased. Some 25,000 people were still living in temporary accommodation at the end of 2006 (Anonymous, 2006, 13-19 December). The accommodation is sub-standard, which particularly impacts on personal security for women. A report by the Indonesian National Commission on Violence Against Women (Samsidar, 2006) found that there are persistent problems with sexual harassment and assaults on women in barracks. Further, the cramped and difficult living conditions, on top of the other stresses of being displaced and dispossessed, have contributed to an increase in the level of domestic violence, and forced marriages have become common. The series of events that have occurred in

Aceh - conflict, tsunami, Sharia - have eroded the status of women over time, making them increasingly marginalised and vulnerable.

Local women's NGOs I visited while in Aceh had been active in the emergency phase following the tsunami. Although one in particular had itself suffered heavy losses of personnel and premises in the tsunami, it helped with logistical distribution, hygiene care for women, and nutrition for pregnant women in the early days. Since then it has been focusing on women's empowerment, including working with victims of domestic violence and providing micro-finance to women. It works with both tsunami and conflict victims but recognises that the needs of those two groups are different and require different responses. It conducts research to find out what the actual issues are for women and respond accordingly. A representative of the organisation suggested to me that neither the Indonesian government nor INGOS were doing that effectively.

Another local organisation representative suggested the three biggest problems facing women in Aceh are: trauma from the conflict years; the implementation of Sharia; and the patriarchal society. In her view, Aceh is not yet in a post-conflict phase and will not be until proper rehabilitation and reintegration has occurred. There are government plans to give conflict-related compensation to women but so far compensation has only gone to men.

Both organisations had at various times partnered with international agencies such as UNFPA and UNIFEM. [26] But generally, they felt that local organisations had been bypassed by INGOs who did not make use of their local knowledge and experience. The TEC also found this to be the case (Telford & Cosgrave, 2006). One organisation in particular had also experienced opposition to its activities from the local government and religious fundamentalist groups.

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[26] The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

Conclusion

While the Indian Ocean tsunami was not the worst disaster the world has seen in terms of number of deaths, it was the largest in terms of the international response and the funds and resources mobilised. Aceh was undoubtedly the worst affected area. This chapter has explained how three factors in particular have added to Aceh's vulnerability and created additional challenges to organisations working to provide relief and reconstruction in that environment. These are: the scale of the disaster there and the subsequent influx of organisations; the pre-existing and long running conflict; and the implementation of Sharia law. These three characteristics culminated to leave the women of Aceh especially vulnerable during and after the 2004 Tsunami. Consideration and awareness of these factors requires context-specific approaches by INGOs working there. They are factors that impact on gender considerations and as such should have informed the implementation of gender policies in post-tsunami Aceh. And yet, as many of the reports show, INGOs failed to acknowledge the impact these factors had on women and therefore failed to put in place policies and practices that would address these specific aspects appropriately. Further, they did not make use of local NGOs who had knowledge and experience that INGOs could have benefited from.

Chapter Four

Research Methodology

This chapter briefly describes the methodology used for this research. It outlines sources of information, explains how and why I selected research participants and identifies the techniques used to analyse the data collected. There is a short section on the ethical requirements relating to the identification of participants. The chapter concludes with an acknowledgement of the limitations of the research.

Qualitative Research Methodology

The purpose of this case study is threefold: to reveal and analyse the gender-related experiences of individuals from NZ-based NGOs who were in Aceh in the aftermath of the tsunami; to investigate how their sending organisations have responded to those experiences to ensure lessons are learned to improve future practice; and to identify barriers to learning within organisations. I chose to use qualitative research techniques, drawing on both primary and secondary sources of data.

Primary Sources

To enable exploration of the individual experiences and organisational responses I conducted semi-structured interviews with staff of NZ NGOs.[27] This method of inquiry allowed issues to emerge over the course of the research rather than being strictly pre-determined (Creswell, 2007). It has also enabled the voices of the participants, and their own interpretations of what they experienced, to be presented. Thus, the next chapter relies primarily on

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[27] See Appendix One for the Interview Guide.

the participants' own words. However, I acknowledge that as researcher, my own background and experiences, particularly in Aceh, will to some extent have influenced the research process and my interpretation of the findings.

To analyse the data I relied on techniques typical of qualitative research identified by Creswell (2007). I looked for patterns and themes across the interviews and compared and contrasted participants' responses. This involved the use of techniques such as highlighting, tabbing, cross-referencing and drawing charts.

Secondary Sources

I also made use of secondary sources of information. These include various documents provided by the participating organisations, and a variety of other literature including local Acehnese newspapers, international journals and reports (see References). Other secondary sources of information include my own personal observations in Aceh from early December 2006 to mid-February 2007, as well as some informal discussions I had with people there. I note these as secondary sources because although they are my first-hand observations they are not the experiences of the selected participants.

Research Participants

To answer the first research question about the gender-related challenges and experiences of working in Aceh, I spoke directly with people who had spent time there as part of their organisation's tsunami response. To answer the second research question about how organisations have responded to the challenges faced and sought to learn lessons, I spoke with representatives of those NGOs best in a position to comment. As shown below, in many cases the people interviewed for those two research questions were one and the same. All participants responded to questions about organisational learning.

To select participants, I obtained a list of seventeen NZ-based NGOs that were involved in the tsunami response from the Council of International Development (CID), the Wellington based umbrella organisation for New Zealand non-governmental development organisations. That list is presented in column one of Figure 2 below. I contacted the NGOs directly to find out whether they had sent staff to Aceh and this information is recorded in column two. Column three identifies the six agencies that participated in this research.

Figure 2: **Responding NGOs** [28]

NGOs Involved in Tsunami Response	Organisations known to have sent workers to Aceh	Participants in this research
ADRA NZ	√	√
BanzAid		
Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand	√	√
Christian Blind Mission		
CWS		
Habitat for Humanity		
Medical Aid Abroad		
Oxfam NZ	√	√
RedR		
Salvation Army	(√)	(√ - Member of the NZ Salvation Army recruited by IHQ for work in Aceh)
Save the Children	√	
Soroptimists		
Surf Aid	√	
Tear Fund		
UNICEF NZ	√	√
World Vision	√	Not formal participants, but provided some written material
YMCA		

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[28] Not all organisations responded to my enquiries, so Figure 2 only presents information I know to be correct. There may be some omissions through lack of information. Of the organisations that sent staff to Aceh but have not participated in this research, two did not respond to my enquiries. The third was omitted in the initial selection process because the only staff member to go Aceh was the organisation's director, who briefly visited in a monitoring role only. Early on, I had not intended to include those that went in a monitoring capacity. When the subsequent decision was made to include them due to the otherwise small sample size, unfortunately that organisation was omitted by oversight, which is regretted.

Figure 3 below provides some more detailed information about participants. Column one identifies the ten individuals and shows the organisation each worked for. Column two records each participant's role in that organisation. Column three shows when each person was in Aceh, and column four describes the purpose of their visit.

Figure 3 also includes two participants from NZAID, New Zealand's official government aid agency. Recognising the level of co-operation and information sharing that occurs between NZAID and the non-governmental sector, I wanted to obtain NZAID perspectives on some of the issues raised by this research.

Figure 3: **Research Participants**

Participant	Role in Organisation	In Aceh	Purpose of Visit
ADRA • Robert Patton	Emergency Programme Manager (ADRA Asia, contracted to ADRA NZ)	Late December 2004 for up to 3 weeks	Conduct initial needs assessment and set-up for ongoing response
• Alan Fletcher	International Programme Manager	Early January 2005 for 10 days	Support role
Caritas • Tim Chiswell	Humanitarian Programme Manager	Early February 2005 for 3 weeks	Help plan organisational response
Oxfam • Person A	Staff member	March 2006 for 10 days	Monitoring and evaluation
• Renzo Benfatto	Current Humanitarian Programme Manager	(Briefly in 2006 with Child Fund)	N/A
Salvation Army • Martyn Smith	N/A	April – August 2005	Recruited as an engineer but ended up in consultant role
UNICEF • Dennis McKinlay	Executive Director	January 2005 for a week	Facilitate a journalist's visit
• Philippa Day	Corporate Marketing Manager	December 2005 for 4 days	Facilitate a journalist's visit
NZAID • Don Clarke	Director of Global Programmes	N/A	N/A
• Mike Bird (went to Aceh with Oxfam GB)	Development Programme Manager for Civil Society	(Late March 2005 for one month with Oxfam Great Britain)	N/A

Although Martyn Smith was recruited through the international headquarters of the Salvation Army (IHQ) rather than sent directly by the New Zealand Salvation Army (NZSA), I have included him because of the reasonable length of time he spent in Aceh. It was not possible to interview IHQ and not relevant to interview the NZSA. Therefore, his personal experiences are presented but there is no information available about the response of the sending organisation in terms of lessons learned.

In the case of Caritas, the person who went to Aceh, Tim Chiswell, was also the person best placed to comment on organisational response given his role at the time of Humanitarian Programmes Manager. The same applies for the International Programme Manager of ADRA, Alan Fletcher, and the Executive Director of UNICEF, Dennis McKinlay.

Conversely, the current Humanitarian Programme Manager at Oxfam, Benzo Benfatto, went to Aceh after the tsunami when he worked for an NGO not based in New Zealand. Similarly, Mike Bird, who I interviewed for his perspectives as an NZAID staff member, spent some time in Aceh with Oxfam Great Britain. Their experiences of Aceh have nevertheless been included in the following chapter because they have relevant insights into what it was like to work in that context.

It is worth noting briefly here that eight of the ten participants are male, although this fact is not considered in any further depth as part of this research.

Ethics Approval

Ethics approval for this research was required by the Victoria University Ethics Committee and obtained on 28 August 2007. All participants signed consent forms. Consent was also obtained from the head of each participating organisation for the NGO to be identified. All individual participants, except one, consented to being personally identified and having their comments attributed to them. The person who did not wish to be identified by name did

consent to be connected with her NGO and is referred to as Person A. Person A's role has been referred to generically as "staff member" to further protect anonymity.

Limitations of Research

My research has been affected to some extent by the following three limitations: time constraints; the level of staff turnover in NGOs; and small sample size due to the traditional fundraising nature of NZ NGOs.

Time

In keeping with the emergent nature of qualitative research as discussed above, the semi-structured interviews with participants often led to suggestions of other sources of information. The limited time available to complete this thesis meant it was not possible to follow up all of these suggestions.

Staff Turnover

There has been a noticeable level of staff turnover in NZ-based NGOs since the tsunami. In several cases, those who went to Aceh with a particular organisation have moved on to other jobs. That made it difficult to track people down. Similarly, in some cases those in positions ideal for commenting on organisational response, such as humanitarian programme managers, had not been in the role at the time of the tsunami. Knowledge was therefore limited at times, and it has made the potential pool of participants smaller. The problem of staff turnover however does affect my findings and will be discussed in the next chapter.

Sample Size

NZ NGOs are traditionally funding organisations. There are indications this may slowly be changing as organisations increase their capacity to respond to humanitarian emergencies.[29] Certainly, the scale of the tsunami resulted in many NGOs working outside their usual areas of practice. But even so, few sent staff to Aceh and some of those only went briefly in a monitoring and evaluation role rather than as fieldworkers or implementers of programmes. The sample size for this research is therefore small. The research presents the experiences and views of a few individuals. The findings in the next chapter are therefore specific to the participant organisations rather than representative of NZ NGOs and their workers. The research seeks to investigate some of the issues specific to that time and place, i.e. post-tsunami Aceh, and does not purport to apply on a wider scale.

Summary

This chapter briefly discussed the qualitative nature of this study and consequent methodology used to carry it out, including the techniques employed to analyse the data collected. It identified the various sources from which information has been drawn. It also provided some background information about participants that will help put their experiences in Aceh, as discussed in the following chapter, in some context.

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[29] See Chapter Five for further information about this.

Chapter Five

Findings

<u>Introduction</u>

This chapter presents the findings of the research. It begins by restating the main research questions and identifying relevant sub-questions, then explaining the overall importance of the research questions. The chapter is then divided into three parts as per the research questions. Participants' comments are grouped and presented according to topic. The perspectives of two NZAID staff are included in relation to various issues as they come up. It should be noted that the comments are the personal views of the respondents and do not represent an official NZAID response.

The findings in this chapter come primarily from semi-structured interviews conducted with the ten participants. For the most part I have quoted the participants directly. In some cases, where comments are lengthy, I have paraphrased them, trying to remain as true as possible to their original wording. I have also drawn on secondary sources such as documents referred to or provided to me directly by participants.

Research Questions

This research asks three main questions:

1. What were the challenges and experiences faced by NZ NGO workers in implementation of their gender policies and procedures while engaging in relief and reconstruction activities in Aceh?

    This can be broken down into two questions:

a) What were the challenges and experiences?

b) How did these impact on the implementation of gender policies?

2. How have the sending NGOs responded to those challenges and experiences to ensure that lessons have been learned?

I have broken down this question into three sub-questions as follows:

a) How did sending organisations capture the particular experiences of their own staff who went to Aceh?

b) How have organisations sought to learn lessons from their overall tsunami response in Aceh?

c) What specific lessons have been learned about gender?

3. What, if any, obstacles to learning exist within those NGOs?

These questions are important because given the damning reports on the international response and its handling of gender issues in Aceh, understanding the particular challenges faced there will hopefully contribute to an appreciation of the need for gender policies that are responsive to local realities. Further, there is increasing demand for NGOs to be accountable and this requires that they commit themselves to learning lessons from their practical experiences. Understanding the barriers to learning that may exist within NZ NGOs is vital to knowing what may be done to address them and so ensure better learning and thereby better outcomes.

Gender Related Challenges and Experiences

Question: What were the challenges and experiences faced by NZ NGO workers in implementation of their gender

policies and procedures while engaging in relief and reconstruction activities in Aceh?

This section sets out the participants' post-tsunami experiences in Aceh as they relate to gender issues and shows how the various context-specific challenges impacted their ability to implement gender policies. Respondents' comments[30] are presented under eight main subject headings:

1. Scale of the Disaster
2. The Gendered Impacts of the Tsunami
3. Moving from Emergency Response to Reconstruction
4. Media Coverage and Funding
5. Consultation with Women
6. Sharia Law
7. The Impact of the Military and Conflict
8. Gender Policies

Scale of the Disaster

Participants emphatically identified the sheer magnitude of the disaster as being the most challenging aspect of their disaster response activities. Organisations found themselves overwhelmed and unprepared for the scale and this had flow on effects for their operations.

> *I mean the scale of the disaster, I don't think anyone had done before ... It caught everyone off guard, the scale of it, the sheer scale of it.*
>
> Fletcher

> *The scale and magnitude was definitely beyond anything I'd seen ... I mean you plan for disasters but no one had ever planned for anything of that magnitude.*
>
> Patton

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[30] All interviews were conducted between September and December 2007.

The scope of that was beyond anything anyone had ever struck before. It certainly tested our resources.

McKinlay

- Lack of Resources

The extent of the destruction put pressure on the ability of organisations to provide enough resources to meet victims' needs. Also, it meant very little existed by way of basic services and infrastructure to get people and supplies where they were needed.

We were absolutely swamped and overwhelmed by the scale of it and they were pulling resources from anywhere they could get them and they were still struggling to meet the needs.

Fletcher

Access was extremely difficult ... Communications were non-existent ... There was absolutely nothing and it was probably a month before we got even some remotely useful communications in there ... There were no resources, no means of getting them in there ... there was just nothing there ... Because of the huge magnitude of it and the limited resources we had it was just trying to get stuff out for basic survival and it didn't matter who they were really ... there wasn't enough and the need was huge and one of the big things we faced ... was just the sheer logistics of getting stuff in there.

Patton

- Staffing Challenges

Another flow on effect of the scale of the disaster was the difficulty that several NGOs report in attracting, retaining and training staff. This had implications for gender considerations because in some cases it was

necessary to deploy people who had no knowledge or experience of post-disaster response or working with gender policies.

We were pulling all our staff into Banda Aceh from around the world ... it really stretches an organisation even of our size, and we had existing offices, so for other NGOs who weren't there, having to set up from scratch quickly must have been a huge challenge.

McKinlay

There was constant recruitment all the time to try and keep the teams up to speed so that we could continue doing what we'd started doing.

Bird

It was an unusual situation for us too because we hadn't deployed anyone to an emergency before ... The scale of the emergency meant it was all hands to the pump ... I think that has been a continuing theme for the full year following in Aceh, has been to try and recruit and retain huge numbers of staff and huge turnover of staff...over 50% of Oxfam staff have not worked for Oxfam previously so getting recruits up to speed with all the Oxfamness, Oxfam ways of working was a real challenge in itself and gender and development is just one of those.

Person A

In response to a question about what constraints existed to being able to implement gender policies and operate in a gender sensitive way, Bird refers to gender blindness among some of those recruited for specific tasks:

I think usually it's just to do with blindness to the issue amongst the people that you are working with ... people who have never thought about the need to locate toilets sensitively so that women are not at risk of being assaulted going to the toilet during the night for example or where they can't be overlooked by men.

- Coordination Problems

Finally, the scale of the disaster and subsequent level of response resulted in coordination difficulties due to so many actors arriving in the area. Three main implications of the lack of coordination are observed by participants. One is the problem of individuals or small groups arriving in Aceh who had no experience and their activities could not be monitored or subsequently assessed for impact.

> *There were all these little, small NGOs that maybe existed or came into being because of the tsunami who had got a couple of hundred thousand dollars, went up there, didn't have a clue the way the system worked and they went scatter gun doing what they wanted and spent their money and cleared off and that was a huge problem and that made coordination of the whole relief effort very difficult.*
>
> McKinlay

> *Even after a month there were still people coming in and there were still more players turning up at every coordination meeting and from professional agencies on the one side to the scientologists on the other one.*
>
> Chiswell

This point is elaborated on more directly in relation to gender issues later in this chapter under the heading 'Media Coverage and Funding'.

The second impact of the lack of coordination is that because so many groups were operating and the level of competition was high, there was doubling up of NGO activities and consequent inefficiencies.

> *And that's a factor of coordination as well, actually. Why have 5 NGOs gone to that village when one could have done it or a group of them in*

one trip could have done it?

Chiswell

Again, this is something that is discussed later in relation to the issue of consultation, particularly with women, and the problem of "consultation fatigue". The duplication of work being done by NGOs was one of the criticisms levelled by the TEC (Telford & Cosgrave, 2006).

The third impact of the lack of NGO or government coordination is that the military assumed a coordinating role.

> *I arrived in Meulaboh probably 6 days after the tsunami had happened and ADRA was the first NGO to actually register there. But within 24 hours there were about 30 registered...once they started getting in there it was just like a tidal wave itself of NGOs ... it was about another 10 days before the first UN agencies arrived there to help with coordination ... so coordination was being done purely by the military.*

Patton

The issue of military coordination is discussed later in the chapter where several participants suggest the military had its own agenda and they allude to the clamp down on freedom of vulnerable people generally.

Don Clarke, Director of Global Programmes at NZAID, also refers to the lack of coordination of the response effort.

> *There was a huge issue of coordination ... the feedback I've heard time and time again from almost every possible source was about the proliferation of NGO activity on the ground and the lack of coordination and everyone carving it up and then reporting back to their market or their fundraising constituency in their home country and that was quite problematical.*

Clarke

Summary

These comments show that in terms of challenges and experiences, organisations were struggling to meet basic needs in the immediate aftermath of the tsunami in Aceh. The magnitude of the disaster created a number of difficulties for NGOs including lack of resources, including staff, and coordination challenges. How the scale had implications for gender issues will become apparent throughout this chapter.

The Gendered Impacts of the Tsunami

Respondents identify some of the direct gender-specific impacts of the tsunami and the implications of those for their response.

> *One of the key needs that was identified when I got there was that lactating women for instance had a major problem in that they had been breast feeding their babies. Just the sheer shock of what had happened plus there was limited water and limited food initially in those first few days. A lot of them were unable to breast feed.*
>
> Patton

Patton goes on to describe how ADRA provided infant formula in response to this need, a decision that he says attracted some criticism from other organisations.

Participants note the number of women that were killed in the tsunami compared to men.

> *A much higher percentage of children and women died in the tsunami than men anyway because they are more vulnerable and didn't have the strength to hold onto trees and buildings and whatever when the flood came in so you know the amount of women and children you are*

dealing with is much smaller because of the circumstances of the emergency.

<div align="right">Day</div>

Respondents observe how the disproportionate number of women dying impacted on later efforts to work with women.

More women died than men so there was a bit of a gap ... there weren't women to work with, fewer women to represent women's issues and the women that were there were quite overloaded with the daily responsibilities that women had, so perhaps less able to participate in things over and above what they needed to do to keep their families going.

<div align="right">Person A</div>

One of the things that got a lot of media attention was looking at the number of women who had died in the tsunami ... So that was the basis for some advocacy work on making everyone aware of how women had been affected differently by the disaster itself and then the aftermath of it.

<div align="right">Bird</div>

Chiswell comments on the subsequent gendered impacts of the tsunami on those in IDP (internally displaced persons) camps:

The trauma programme ... the uptake amongst women was very high, the uptake amongst men was far more difficult. The main reason being it was the women who were in the camps all the day, the men were out trying to fix things and so they were not actually able to partake in the social groups.

This comment contrasts with the observations of another participant about men in camps.

My observations of going to the camp was that men were suffering the most because they had no work to go to and they were used to getting out of the home and going somewhere and doing men stuff and the women are used to be at home with the kids, you know. And so I think in some regards the men suffered in the camps because they were just lost.

McKinlay

This observation is notable because it is the only comment in all the discussions I had about gender issues that specifically identifies how men were impacted by the tsunami. This apparent lack of consciousness of men's issues is consistent with the literature that identifies the tendency of many organisations to continue to focus on 'women' rather than on 'gender'.[31]

Other gender issues that emerged in the aftermath of the tsunami that organisations had to contend with include the trafficking of girls, ensuring school buildings were safe for girls, and issues of land ownership.

We were particularly active in regards to getting the government to immediately establish a policy about children leaving the country without their parents ... because girls tend to be trafficked more than boys I would say that that is probably the most obvious intervention in relation to gender out of all that I saw.

McKinlay

That's a gender specific issue of enabling girls to feel safe at school and private which hadn't been taken into consideration in the reconstruction efforts.

Day

The issue around land, where people were going and how do you engage with, or help people who don't have secure land tenure ...that

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[31] See for example MacDonald (2003).

was complicated with land ownership and whether women could own any land or it was typically in the name of the husband and if the husband was lost had she lost her land rights... that's quite a big issue.

Person A

Summary

The most immediate gender-related impacts of the tsunami observed by participants were that it killed many more women than men, and some surviving women experienced an inability to breastfeed due to trauma. One of the flow-on implications of the disproportionate number of male survivors was that there were fewer women to represent women's views. Participants also point to the different effects on men and women of living in IDP camps. Other gender issues emerged as the reconstruction process began, including: the problem of trafficking of girls; the need to ensure that girls' safety was taken into account as school buildings were rebuilt; and the complications of land ownership rights for women when it came to compensating people for land lost to the tsunami.

Moving from Emergency Response to Reconstruction

The comments below reveal that the way gender is treated tends to change as things move from the initial emergency phase to longer-term development. Respondents say that fieldworkers do have gender considerations in mind from the outset but that in the urgency of the immediate disaster aftermath, gender considerations beyond obvious practical gender needs are unrealistic in practice. These comments reflect what is observed in the literature on this subject, discussed in Chapter Two.

Within the first few days of being there I was going to these IDP shelters and we were aware of the special needs of women and therefore we were looking at how do we cater to that so...there were some unique needs based on gender that were being addressed in

those early stages. They are fairly basic if you like. It was more in your face stuff rather than the subtle gender needs that often you have to go looking for...

From experience, I know the text books might tell you otherwise, but from experience when you are in those first initial survival phases, you focus on survival rather than ... it is almost like gender is a luxury ...and it's not to say that it's not important but just sheer survival.

<div align="right">Patton</div>

Another participant stresses the importance of having regard to gender issues from the outset.

[Gender awareness] is essential [in the emergency phase] because everything is fast, it is critical, people die quicker ... everything is exacerbated, it's bigger, so it is essential ... You may even make more mistakes, but that is why you dedicate special resources to those things ... 'how many women and children are there? What do they do?' ... If you don't really look at that thing in a special way you risk to forget, because they tend to be in the shade because they are weaker, because other people are stronger, they have the power, so if you don't pay special attention to them you have the big crisis.

<div align="right">Benfatto</div>

Chiswell states that while gender is generally given consideration from the start, it takes time to understand the realities of a given context. He observes that sometimes an organisation's gender policies have little to do with the realities on the ground.

Relevant to...gender and gender response ... there are a lot of guidelines out there about how one should do things and there's a lot of ways of writing these things ... you can get away with blue murder ... and with very little actual basis for writing them other than say general policy, if that makes sense ... I guess at the early stage there

was a lot of consideration being thought through about how women
should be involved in the processes, but the practicalities of actually
what would work and what wouldn't was yet to be found out.

Chiswell

Chiswell's statement is consistent with what the literature says about policies being developed far removed from actual practice and not being particularly relevant to realities on the ground.[32]

The following comments indicate that it is only after the initial emergency phase that the real vulnerabilities and power struggles become apparent anyway, and that is the point when it becomes essential to focus more attention on gender.

We certainly don't put [gender issues] aside ... at the back of your mind
you always have the issue of 'how's this impacting women and
children, the most vulnerable?' But in terms of the initial first 3 – 5 day
response it's like a triage situation. It doesn't really matter whether they
are male of female ... I didn't feel at all uncomfortable that that was
causing discrimination with women and children ...

... Next phase was shelter, water and food and the living conditions
people had to survive in after the tsunami and that's where the women
and children became vulnerable ... There's not a lot of intentional
gender discrimination. As people struggle to help those who are
vulnerable, who are in general without the necessities of life, there's
generally a camaraderie that cuts across those gender issues in the
early stages. But once people have survived that and are out the other
side and then there is a scramble for resources ... it becomes then a
power issue of who's in control of the rebuilding and who gets the
contracts ... all of human nature comes back to the fore and you have

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[32] See for example Hilhorst (2002) and Hovland (2003).

the potential for male dominance to override good judgement.

<div align="right">Fletcher</div>

Fletcher also notes the importance of taking opportunities to address power issues following a major crisis.

> *It's also a tremendous opportunity to take a community which has faced a major crisis, that has perhaps broken down some of those traditional values and say here's an opportunity to rebuild, but a new structure which does actually address those issues. So, at any stage I guess, of a stage of sudden trauma and change there's an opportunity to come out of it stronger and better by rebuilding something new and well structured or it retrenches back in again and allows the strong to dominate.*

Benfatto, on the other hand, cautions that while the emergency phase may be a good entry point for addressing gender inequalities, change cannot be expected to occur in that phase:

> *[Often there are] cultural factors that it takes time to change, so if you think because it is an emergency people will start thinking different, good luck to you. These things take a very long time. Probably it is a good entry point. When you can consult better, you have the opportunities to introduce this sort of stuff, you can use it as an opportunity to introduce these things ... But if you limit it to the emergency things, you will not change it.*

This point echoes the study done by El-Bushra & El-Karib in 2002 (discussed in Chapter Two) that questions how realistic it is to bring about change in a post-conflict context when the opportunity appears to be the greatest.

Summary

The above comments suggest that the challenge lies in recognising gender issues as they emerge over time after the initial disaster. The general experience of participants who were in Aceh in the immediate tsunami aftermath was that attention to gender became easier after the emergency phase when the focus was on basic survival. In the initial phase obvious gender issues were able to be addressed on a practical level, but the underlying, strategic gender needs take time to become apparent and understood, and are more likely to be able to be addressed once the urgency of the emergency is over.

Media Coverage and Funding

Two major factors identified by one participant that presented challenges to the implementation of gender policies, and attention to gender issues in general, were the intense media scrutiny and the unprecedented levels of funding available to NGOs. As Chiswell notes:

> *If this had been Darfur or this had been just about any other response where the funding was of a lesser level, the work up of the programmes would be a bit different I think in terms of the outside accountability for what was being implemented … I think the other thing that actually impacts on quality was the fact that there was such a high media scrutiny of it that they had to be seen to be moving ahead perhaps a lot quicker than what really is practical. And therefore the degree of rigour that's required to put in place a programme was less because everyone's looking at it and you just had to show that yes look I'm delivering things … that did not help with the degree of rigour around women's issues, women's and gender issues.*

Clarke, agrees with this observation and adds:

Public pressure and the unrealistic expectation which is there in the media and there amongst politicians ... particularly in the Aceh case where so few international organisations were present on the ground [before the tsunami] ... made it even more complicated. It made it more difficult to engage with local communities, and understand the local context and respond appropriately. Yeah, all those things did add up to a lot of rushed responses, which weren't well coordinated.

Summary

Because NGOs did not have to compete for funds to the extent they often do, and because the pressure to show results was so intense, respondents consider this directly resulted in a lack of rigour with which NGOs implemented their gender policies, the implication being that NGOs were less concerned with ensuring close adherence to gender policies, and there was a lack of external accountability.

Consultation with Women

The marginalisation of Acehnese women and the lack of consultation with them is one of the major criticisms of INGOs by Acehnese women themselves, by the TEC and by numerous others.[33] Participants in this research acknowledge that women were sidelined and comment on some of the issues around that.

Chiswell notes there was a solid gender bias already within the community and agrees that:

In the reconstruction model around housing, and things like that ... women did get left on the outside of a lot of those.

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[33] For example: Eye on Aceh (2006) and Schulze (2005).

Gender is an important issue to be considered in the context of housing reconstruction. NZAID commissioned a report on gender issues in the post-tsunami context (Habitat International Coalition, 2005). While the report focussed on Sri Lanka rather than Aceh, it shows the importance of paying attention to gender issues in humanitarian work. The criticisms contained in the report provide an opportunity for learning for future practice.

They came out with a very damning report on the behaviour of international agencies in the way that they neglected or didn't pay due attention to the rights of women and children, both in the short term housing arrangements and camps and also in longer term housing reconstruction planning. I think it's a report that needs to be given profile and attention because it showed the way that, from the start, women and girls often suffered through the way that sanitation facilities and housing arrangements and so on were put together. And there's been a lot of consequences flowing out of that in terms of young marriages and HIV/AIDS and sexual harassment and so on ... so a quite hard hitting but I think pertinent report.

<div align="right">Clarke</div>

Clarke points directly to gender as being one of the major overall failures of the international community in the tsunami response:

And then at the heart of it all ... is the rights of women. I think it's fundamental, I mean it's fundamentally fundamental if I can say that and it's an area where the international community had let go of the ball a lot.

Although there were legitimate concerns about the lack of consultation, Chiswell goes on to suggest that one reason (in addition to the lack of rigour due to surplus funding) might be that there came a point where beneficiaries were experiencing consultation fatigue due to the proliferation of NGOs:

'You are the fifth NGO that has come through asking the same questions' ... I've heard of examples of where communities say 'we don't want to talk about it any more just give us it'.

Chiswell's comment is consistent with that made by de Ville de Goyet et al cited in Cosgrave (2007, p. 16) that "... the people affected by the tsunami ... felt over-assessed but not consulted."

Bird, while recognising the risk of consultation fatigue, hints at the difference between being assessed and being consulted and emphasises the importance of knowing what questions to ask. The challenge is getting the balance right. He says,

[Knowing the right questions to ask] can avoid riots in camps. You've always got to have antennae wiggling and be aware of the need not to assume that the first answer you're given ... is the definitive answer but to carry on asking and asking. But it is a difficult balance to strike because people of Aceh soon got fed-up with people asking questions and were like, 'aren't you here to help? Give us stuff' ... But by asking questions judiciously and in the right way you can avoid what can be really damaging consequences.

In Person A's experience, consulting with women was not always practical given the cultural realities of the context and sometimes it can slow down and even threaten what an organisation is trying to achieve:

Say for example you needed a water committee to work for the six months that the IDP camp is going to be open and you say 'we have to have 50% women on this', but the cultural reality is that women aren't listened to, don't have the skills, and by the time you create a voice for them within that community, and people are prepared to listen to them and respect them and train them with the skills to do it, you jeopardise what you were trying to achieve, which is a functioning water supply ... So you are already working in a difficult context and sometimes the

gender aspects of it can make it harder when you've got a short-term goal. I think if you're working on a longer-term project then you should absolutely do that.

Chiswell observes that consultation with women occurred more easily and naturally when work was being done that was small in scope and at a grass roots level:

In terms of gender issues ... around the JRS[34] response, I think because it was so grassroots, the meeting I went to with community leaders while I was there, there was a very strong presence of both men and women at that meeting providing it with the perspective of both. I think it was because it was small and manageable levels of funding that that did work ... The big responses will be led and run by men. The smaller community level responses there were far more, far better engagement for both.

Summary

Participants found it difficult to consult with women in Aceh for various reasons. They point to an existing gender bias within the community and say that the realities of the local context meant women don't have a voice and trying to create one for them can threaten short-term projects. Some point to the demand from the Acehnese people that INGOs stop asking questions and just provide things, which created a challenge to NGOs to know the right questions to ask in trying to balance that demand with the need to ensure proper consultation. One participant observes that better engagement with women occurred where NGO responses were smaller and had manageable funding levels, so were less likely to be controlled by men.

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[34] Jesuit Refugee Service, an NGO funded by Caritas that was doing social work in Aceh before the tsunami hit.

Sharia Law

Participants' experiences of Sharia law while in Aceh vary depending on when they visited. Those who were there immediately after the tsunami did not find Sharia restrictive. They speak of being aware of working in a Muslim society but that it did not directly affect their operations, in relation to gender or otherwise. It was those who visited Aceh later who observed Sharia restricting the ability of organisations to implement gender policies and programmes. This is not surprising since Sharia became more strictly enforced in mid-2005, following the tsunami.

In those first few weeks there wasn't any impact ... there wasn't Sharia law practised at that point or wasn't enforced. I think everyone was mindful of the population we were working with were predominantly Muslim ... I'm not aware of any incidents or problems other than occasionally at coordination meetings there would be a reminder to people just to be conscious of the fact of where you were working, the population you were working with.

Patton

My background is working in Muslim/Arab countries anyway ... some of those forms of control of women and their accessibility to certain places, being able to travel for medical supplies or for food or whatever and the restrictions that were placed on them are part of the culture anyway. I didn't see anywhere in my brief exposure to it where that caused a problem for women, where they couldn't access supplies because their husbands said no or there were religions restrictions.

Fletcher

This observation is consistent with the views of another participant, that in the relief phase at least, women and girls probably had better access to resources than they were used to having. However, this comment is speculative rather than being based on direct observations.

In those situations generally boys and men get first preference with health care or any extra expenditure that's available within the family ... I'm sure that for lots of women and girls they were treated in a way that they got access to health care and they got access to food on an equal basis [during the relief phase] and I would imagine for many that would be not their traditional experience.

<div align="right">McKinlay</div>

Chiswell describes how it was a challenge to find forums to talk to women directly. Empowering women was difficult because of the restrictions imposed on women by Sharia law. However, he notes that:

Luckily for the first part of the response I think some of those restrictions were not so strong as they may be during peacetime. Although Aceh would be accused ... [of having] brought this upon themselves ... some imam was saying they brought this on themselves because they were behaving immorally.

As noted in Chapter Three, this religious explanation for the tsunami propagated by the imams (religious leaders) usually placed the blame on women, and provided justification, in their view, for enforcing Sharia more strictly following the tsunami. Person A's comment below indicates how Sharia became more restrictive as time went on.

Sharia law was really starting to raise its head and become a major limitation the amount women were able to speak out and participate in management of any of the things that were being set up.

<div align="right">Person A</div>

I suppose overlaid on all of that you've got Sharia law that was in place in Aceh, so again there are questions there about how sensitively that was applied.

<div align="right">Bird</div>

Aceh is not very easy to work in gender ... it is very Muslim, the most Muslim of all of Indonesia. The introduction of Sharia law ... I'm sure it doesn't make things easier.

<div align="right">Benfatto</div>

Summary

The main effects of Sharia observed by participants were not in the initial emergency phase but later on. The challenge presented by Sharia was that it made it more difficult to actively include women, as they were less visible and available to participate because of the religious restrictions imposed on them.

Impact of Military and Conflict

Aceh was, and is, both a post-disaster and a post-conflict environment. Mostly respondents did not directly link the pre-existing conflict or the military presence to gender issues, but they did refer to them as being factors that impacted on their operations in Aceh.   Four impacts are identified in the comments below. The first is the role the military assumed of coordinating the relief efforts and its attempts to control NGO activities as well as the local population. Patton observes that initially:

Co-ordination was being done purely by the military. They had their own agenda at that point in time but they were really the only co-ordinating body.

He goes on to suggest somewhat cautiously that while there were no actual incidents that directly impacted on NGOs in the first few weeks, the military tried to take advantage of the situation and control NGO movements. He recalls the military reporting "incidents" and issuing warnings to NGOs in an attempt to limit their activities.

Other respondents express concerns about the military's control of tsunami victims in barracks.

There seemed to have been an advantage taken of the unstable situation ... to actually clamp down on a number of community groups and their ability to return to their areas or a form of control through the use of refugee barracks and centres where they could be monitored ... and controlled ... I was concerned about some of the refugee areas where they were restricting people in order to control them, where they were forcing people to live in cramped conditions with little personal privacy, family privacy and using that as a way of saying that you can't go back to your areas because we want you, we need you here for humanitarian reasons, but really they were probably more control reasons.

Fletcher

The second impact of the pre-existing war identified by participants, is the conflicting role of the military in a post-conflict and post-disaster context and the threat that poses to the opportunity to address gender inequalities.

In a civil war context, I think with local military involved who play both sides as humanitarian supporters plus the other, there is a confusion of roles and there's probably a far smaller window of opportunity for NGOs to come in and break that [gender discrimination and power issues], and that was one of the things we tried to do in the tsunami response, to be careful to distance ourselves from the military.

Fletcher

[Barracks] were the temporary accommodation that were put up by the Indonesian Army and a lot of people had memories of the way in which those barracks were used as a kind of social control mechanism in Timor and so people were sceptical about whether there was some

additional agenda behind just providing emergency shelter for people.

Bird

Another respondent also mentions the wariness amongst Acehnese towards the military, which lay just below the surface.

A lot of soldiers and soldiers' families got killed as well so ... there was common grieving and therefore a coming together. But I am sure as time went on it may have worn thin. But I didn't notice much, talked to people a bit, and they said: 'if you had seen what we had seen under this Indonesian Army, you wouldn't have pleasant thoughts about the Indonesian Army.'

Smith

The third impact of the pre-existing conflict is the need for NGOs to be aware of operating in a post-conflict environment. As Chiswell says,

There was a complete loss of control by the military. They had also been hammered; they lost a whole battalion on the east coast ... So it required a degree of respect with the way the people negotiated and an understanding of who you were negotiating with and an understanding that this actually is a post-conflict environment as well.

McKinlay articulates the fourth impact of the conflict on NGO activities in Aceh. He notes that because of the conflict, most organisations did not have pre-existing operations in Aceh, so it was more difficult for them to establish themselves in the wake of the tsunami:

We were the only NGO that had an office there. All the other NGOs had been told to leave Aceh because of the religious [situation] and the fighting and UNICEF was the only office allowed to have a presence so we were there, we had contacts, we had programmes going, so probably more than anybody else we were able to hit the ground running.

Clarke agrees:

Particularly in the Aceh case where so few international organisations were present on the ground ... It made it even more complicated. It made it more difficult to engage with local communities, and understand the local context and respond appropriately.

Summary

One of the challenges faced by NGOs of operating in the post-conflict environment was that their movements were somewhat restricted as the military sought to maintain control. Respondents also expressed concern that the movements of tsunami victims were restricted by the military, increasing victims' vulnerability. (The living conditions in the camps and barracks and the lack of security for women are discussed in Chapter Three). Respondents were aware of the need to be conscious of the post-conflict environment and careful in their dealings with the military. Learning some of the realities of the local context took time for some NGOs because they had no pre-existing experience in the area due to the long-running conflict.

Gender Policies

All NGOs that participated in this research have gender policies and/or subscribe to the Sphere Standards. Participants express a variety of views about gender policies and the value of those policies to the work they were doing in Aceh.

Several respondents commented that the gender agenda is largely donor driven.

I think sometimes [gender policy] is almost a little bit over-egged, its frustrating when you are trying to build a water supply or whatever it is and someone is coming in and saying, 'so have you gender sensitised your database ... have you picked a female supplier- whoever you are buying your bricks from?' ... It just sometimes feels like it is rolled out to kind of almost become a dogma ... Because you've got people whose specific job is to look at gender, it can take on a life of its own beyond what practically needs to be done and there's lots of things to do with gender that are really deeply engrained in the culture.

Person A

[Gender] is mainstreamed in the organisation. It is part of the overall policy, every time you need to keep it in consideration because...with NZAID's funds there's also questions – 'did you consider...?' So willing or not you have to keep it in consideration, if nothing else in your mind, you have to write down something.

Benfatto

Although the profile of gender is always present in everything that we do, I mean, donors for instance demand it in all of their proposals whether you like it or not, so there is always a certain profile within ADRA with regards to gender. It's more than ticking boxes, but if I was to be perfectly honest the driver is probably more the donor's requirements rather than the organisation driving it, but the organisation supports it.

Patton

The comments below reflect the tendency for gender policies to be broad in nature, but there is recognition of the need to be able to adapt those policies to a more specific context.

Our policy here is probably quite general and broad to try and cover the fact that we work across a number of different situations ... There may be situations where a gender policy has to be written in a local context.

I think there are certainly different gender issues that face people in different cultures and different countries.

<div align="right">Fletcher</div>

Policies tend to be quite overarching and in a way don't rule anything in or out. I mean that is not quite right, they do. They give you a guideline, a framework. But they don't answer all of your questions for you, you still have to figure it out … It's not enough to go through the motions, you kind of have to feel it as well and some people do and some people don't and its probably a question of sensitivity; it is also a question of practice I think and experience in getting used to a way of thinking about things and a way of doing things.

<div align="right">Bird</div>

As was noted by Bird and others under 'Staffing Challenges' earlier in this chapter, in many cases staff recruited did not have that experience.

Participant responses in this section indicate that one of the challenges is being able to translate broad gender policies into something that is workable on the ground in a given context. As Bird suggests, it relies to some extent on people who are implementing the policy being able to "feel it" as they go. These observations are consistent with the calls in the literature for policies to be flexible enough to adapt to the realities of a given context.[35]

Some of the comments above suggest that gender is largely donor driven. While there is no direct evidence of this here, there is a risk that such perceptions may translate into implementing gender policies in a way that focuses on meeting donor requirements rather than on meeting beneficiaries' needs.

Clarke discusses how in practice organisations are consistently falling short when it comes to implementing gender policy:

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[35] See for example Kabeer (1999).

*Agreement around gender mainstreaming and then just looking at the
way it's played out and we're quite clear as an agency [NZAID] that it's
played out through a lot of good policy and through a lot of good
rhetoric but the practice substantially is not yet there. You know, all
these years after Beijing ... it's a loss of momentum and leadership and
institutional knowledge, and the thing we always look for ... we would
expect to see in your strategic plan, next year's operational plan, and
budgets, you know, especially in the budgets, some dollar signs which
is saying that we are resourcing this in this way, training, research,
staff, capability for engagement. If you can't see it in the budget,
normally it's because it's not actually happening apart from rhetoric and
policy level. And then it's assumed that it'll flow out and staff will pick it
up in their work on the ground and so on. So that's one sort of crude
measure we looked at to try and use.*

Clarke's comments throughout this section stress the importance of gender as
a paramount issue in the humanitarian context. He also states unequivocally
that the international NGO community failed in terms of gender issues in the
tsunami response. He concedes the lessons learned from the tsunami around
gender are the same as after previous major disasters. And given the findings
of the TEC, later on in this chapter he lays down a clear challenge to the aid
and development community in New Zealand to actually learn the lessons this
time and keep them alive so that future practice is improved.

Summary

This section has identified the challenges and experiences of NZ NGO
workers who went to Aceh following the tsunami, particularly in relation to
gender issues and how those impacted on their ability to implement their
gender policies. The experiences of participants in this research are
consistent with the literature (reviewed in Chapter Two) that discusses

reasons why implementation of gender policies remains problematic, particularly in emergency contexts.

The results show that for those working in the initial days after the tsunami, the scale of the disaster and the level of urgency was such that organisations were stretched to their limits in terms of resources and staff. This meant that gender issues were not a major consideration, beyond basic, obvious gender needs. For those who were in Aceh after the initial emergency period, gender issues became more apparent and required greater attention. For example, one of the major gendered impacts of the tsunami was the disproportionate number of women that died and consequently, participants found fewer women to consult with.

Cultural and religious factors also noticeably impacted on the ability of participants to consult with women and implement their gender policies in the post-emergency phase. It was difficult to find forums to consult with women because women were busy with domestic responsibilities, restricted by Sharia law, and the reality was women did not have a voice, and attempting to create one for them at times threatened what NGOs were trying to achieve.

Sharia law, as it became more strictly enforced in the months following the tsunami, had a noticeable impact on women's freedom and therefore their ability to participate in the reconstruction process. A further restriction on freedom was the level of military control, which affected both tsunami victims and NGOs, who felt their movements were to some extent controlled by the military.

In addition to those context-specific factors, participants also observed external factors that impacted on their implementation of gender policies in Aceh, including: their own broad gender policies; the level of funding available to NGOs; and the amount of media scrutiny on their activities. Gender policies of NGOs tend to be broad in nature so as to be applicable in a range of circumstances. Being able to implement them in Aceh required an understanding of gender issues as they emerged in that context over time.

The ability of staff to "feel" their way is important and is something that comes with experience. Some respondents felt gender was largely a donor-driven issue, which may result in a misplaced focus on donor requirements rather than beneficiary needs. The amount of funding available for relief and development after the tsunami and the level of media scrutiny put pressure on NGOs to show results, which meant there was less rigour than usual around gender issues, and a lack of external accountability.

The next section reveals what, if anything, NZ NGOs have done in response to those experiences in Aceh to capture learning for their organisations.

Organisational Response and Learning

Question: How did the sending organisations respond to those
challenges and experiences to ensure that lessons
were learned?

The aim of this question is to find out how sending organisations captured the experiences of their staff that went to Aceh, to assist with learning lessons as an organisation to improve the quality of future practice. Two other sub-questions emerge here:

1. How have the participating organisations sought to learn lessons from their tsunami response?
2. What specific lessons have been learned about gender?

<u>Learning from International Affiliates</u>

Most of the participant NGOs are engaged in various post-tsunami learning activities as part of their larger international networks. This is an important source of learning for NZ NGOs, as they tend to be smaller in size than their

counterparts from other countries and they are traditionally funding organisations rather than operational organisations. Below, participants discuss the value of the learning that has taken place at the international level.

In October 2005 ... we did a major review of how we had responded ... We reviewed extensively how ADRA had managed it, what had we learnt ... and there have been quite significant changes in our planning and policies and that type of thing based on the findings of that summit ... From memory I don't believe that gender was a component or a focus of that summit. Whether there were gender related issues that came up, I can't recall.

Patton

There is a committee based in Rome which I chaired ... the International Cooperation Committee ... that basically looks at humanitarian policy procedure for the whole 172 members of the federation ... obviously one of the big pieces of work that came out of that was actually how do we capture the learning across dozens of responding Caritas organisations. We commissioned a number of studies, we then ... completely rewrote basically our procedure ... So that, the tsunami plus Dafur, plus, going right back to Gujarat 2001 ... we were basically able to take some of that learning and put it back up to the policy level and strategy...so now how do we operationalise those strategies ... Was there a gender specific strategy? No there wasn't, but there was certainly one around engagement and making sure that there was a far better consistency about how we deal with communities, with local church communities ... with vulnerables as a whole, with vulnerable people and communities ... basically you have to engage at gender level as well. So there was quite a big process that went up and it came down to policy and the tsunami fitted very nicely into that whole redevelopment and gave us a lot to think about.

Chiswell

None of the participants in this research recall any specific learning about gender from their international affiliates. However, two organisations, Oxfam and World Vision, are still involved in a process of learning that relates directly to gender. Oxfam Aceh-Nias, operating through Oxfam Great Britain, is holding a conference in Aceh in mid-March 2008 to address the issue of gender equality in the emergency response. The conference seeks to learn how performance can be improved, recognising that even with gender mainstreaming often organisations fall short in practice. Staff from Oxfam organisations worldwide have been invited. While not initiated by Oxfam New Zealand, it is clearly a worthwhile learning opportunity on this issue in which it can participate.

World Vision, although not otherwise direct participants in this research, advised me that World Vision International is in the process of preparing a report on gender in Aceh post-tsunami in collaboration with the Asia Research Institute. It was hoped the report would be available for inclusion in this research but I was recently informed that the release date has been postponed indefinitely.

Aware of some of the major problems with the international tsunami response, NZAID wanted to have a voice at an international level as part of the formal evaluation.

> *We deliberately chose not to do our own evaluation, but we became part of the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition ... So, as well as having input into the thinking around the design of that whole exercise we also provided some funding for it as well and our particular focus in it was to support work around the engagement with local beneficiaries, the role that they played, you know in the local communities and population and the accountability of international agencies to those local communities or local beneficiaries. And also part of our funding which was quite small overall, that was also designed to make sure that the findings of*

the global evaluation process reached local players on the ground for their benefit and their follow up.

<div align="right">Clarke</div>

Clarke goes on to comment that the TEC findings about the impact of the tsunami on women and their subsequent role in the reconstruction of Aceh were consistent with feedback NZAID was getting from NZ NGOs.

Bird, Development Programme Manager for Civil Society at NZAID, notes that many of the lessons being picked up by NZ NGOs are others' lessons rather than their own:

> *It is for that reason that NZAID did get involved in the Evaluation Coalition. At least then we have a seat at the table. We are able to learn what can be learned out of the process and make sure that things were put on the table. But we are not really speaking from our own experience. We are speaking to the experience of others because we are a step or two removed.*

NZAID has drawn on lessons from the tsunami response in the drafting of its own Humanitarian Action Policy. [36]

> *We're just in the process of finalising it at the moment which has drawn quite a lot on the tsunami lessons, especially those from the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition ... But, all the issues around paying attention to the rights and needs of women and children, making sure the human rights are there up front in the first moments of the response, that we are seeking to engage with and support local response and do it in a way that builds capacity and doesn't undermine local capacity. All those things are quite prominent in the principles and guidelines we set out in our policy draft.*

<div align="right">Clarke</div>

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[36] The NZAID Draft Humanitarian Policy is currently in a consultation period through to March 2008. The draft policy is available on the NZAID website: http://www.nzaid.govt.nz.

Clarke observes that while the lessons have been picked up by NZAID and incorporated into their draft Humanitarian Action Policy, they are the same lessons that are being "learned" over and over again by the international community. The question is how to capture those lessons so that it translates into improved practice next time around.

> *But in terms of deeper issues around a big international response in a situation like that, I suspect myself there's a lot of repeating of lessons, case after case. Hurricane Mitch, huge issues. Somalia, huge issues. Kosovo, Bosnia, huge issues. Asia tsunami, Pakistan earthquake and when you go back and look at the issues and the lessons they're the same issues and lessons ... the tsunami lessons really are the same lessons that pretty much come out of similar events over many, many years and so the challenge for the international community, and OCHA has a key role in this as the UN coordinating body, is to translate those issues into policy and practise and back it up in terms of resourcing and training and guidelines and standards and monitoring and holding organisations to account and so on ... So I have a strong sense myself that what's in the tsunami findings, we really need to stay with, and keep alive and just not let go as we move on to the next set of lessons or the next big events. I would like to see us for example and I guess it's the same challenge for NZ NGOs, to say lets really do something with this you know. This is the first set of findings that's quite so comprehensive, so multi-stakeholder and it's had so much profile. Let's do something.*

> *I mean they've [TEC] wound down and let go most of the capability that they had to put this together which then does raise that question about the monitoring of this follow up and the need for, at some point in-country and maybe regionally and even globally, a subsequent stock take, to sit down and see what have we done with this, what has changed ... I know it's still alive for us here. We need to pay it more attention I think still. I know its still on the table for NZ NGOs and*

> *they've got their own lessons too, that they drew for themselves. But it's probably using processes like the NDRF, quarterly meetings with CID, ongoing reporting with Programme Management Committee that HAF[37] is receiving to keep the issues and lessons alive.*

<div align="right">Clarke</div>

One of the key considerations in the draft Humanitarian Action Policy is a commitment to ensuring lessons are learned, and it contains a section on the importance of accountability that commits NZAID to working with others, including civil society to ensure ongoing participatory learning processes.

Summary

Most respondent organisations report participating in a process of learning as part of their international networks. ADRA and Caritas identify significant changes to their policies based in part on lessons learned from the tsunami, although none of those lessons relate to gender as far as respondents can recall. NZAID too has drawn on the experience of the tsunami in the drafting of its Humanitarian Action Policy.

Learning as Part of the NZ NGO Community

The following comments discuss how a significant amount of the learning that has occurred has been across the NZ NGO sector. Chiswell states:

> *The NGO community is very small in New Zealand ... there's a lot of discussion about learning whether its about gender or otherwise and how to do that effectively as a community.*

Clarke felt that,

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[37] The Humanitarian Action Fund, administered by NZAID, is a contestable fund available to NZ NGOs who are involved in disaster and emergency responses through local partners.

From conversations and through the various discussions between ourselves and the NGO community which followed the tsunami there was quite a period of engagement and interaction for the year or eighteen months afterwards ...

... And what happens is that there is quite a close working relationship between the Council for International Development and the Programme Management Committee which looks after the HAF, and the Programme Management Committee keeps an eye on ... emerging issues or common issues or gaps from across all the programmes that they are responsible for overseeing ... and if certain issues emerge where there's obviously a bit of a need across the sector or a bit of a gap ... that'll be fed into the discussion of the Council for International Development which then feeds it into its own annual, pretty extensive, comprehensive training and support programme for NZ NGOs. So, that's the way that learning and lessons can be picked up and taken out ... So reporting has a dual function of accountability and assurance for use of public funds and also a function around learning and doing better ... I'm not aware of, for example, whether there are any particular issues that have come out and been taken forward around gender issues and rights.

Clarke considers there are good systems for information sharing and learning across the sector. He refers to the NDRF[38], which meets regularly, the Programme Management Committee and other annual meetings that NZAID holds with NGOs. So NZAID is part of the sector wide process of reporting, planning, prioritising and capacity building.

As Bird comments,

I think the sector will continue to grow and I think there's a very good spirit of collegiality and again an assumption of goodwill all round ...

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[38] Non-government Organisations Disaster Relief Forum, hosted by the Council for International Development (CID) in Wellington.

That's a very good forum for sharing lessons ... I think there's quite a strong culture of learning actually and increasingly it's learning our own lessons rather than recycling other people's lessons.

Summary

Respondents consider that the NGO community in New Zealand, being small, provides a good forum for sharing information and learning lessons. However, respondents were not able to point to any gender-related lessons that had been learned in this context.

Learning as an Organisation

In addition to participating in the learning of their international affiliates, and sharing lessons with the NGO community in New Zealand, the following comments reveal what NZ NGOs have done to capture their own learning. The statements indicate that there tend not to be comprehensive systems in place for learning within the organisations, but that learning relies more on informal channels or is part of annual reflection processes.

I think what we do typically for any of our travel [is] we often present within our internal staff meetings. If there's anything, crucial lessons learned that would affect our engagement in these things more then it kind of gets rolled into our annual reflection process. So each year we have an annual reflection on stuff we've supported during the year, what some of the major findings of that are and that leads into planning for the next year, so things come up out of that. A lot of that is more related to the mechanics of how we engage in that type of big international response rather than the learnings on the ground of contextual and programme related stuff.

Person A

At a regular time every year or every certain period you review those things there so you check, basically you are monitoring and learning process ... You see where the issues are and if you have issues you try to adjust your programme accordingly. Everybody shares their experience whatever it is and often we learn from each other and we are able to introduce what we've been learning from the process.

Benfatto

Benfatto went on to comment that what tends to happen is that people get together and discuss and review on an informal basis and hopefully learn in that way from each other, but:

It is not systematic and I am not really sure how much is retained.

The lack of a systematic approach referred to above is also identified by another participant.

What do you do with your lessons learned, how do they change from policy and from policy into action? And how do you not lose them? As a small organisation, I guess a certain amount of those lessons learned are sort of stuck in my head and in a way to be discussed and transferred into policy and documentation and so forth ... It will come through in the observations you make on project design and implementation in the field, both formally and informally through that sort of process.

Fletcher

One of the problems identified in the literature is that reviews and reports get done, but they end up sitting on a shelf somewhere.[39] Referring to the tsunami lessons learned summit held by ADRA, Fletcher, who did not attend the summit himself, comments:

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[39] See for example Power, Maury and Murray (2002).

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The flow of information hasn't been as good as I would have liked but they have at least done it and it is sitting somewhere. We can probably access it if we were desperate.

On the issue of reporting and learning lessons, Clarke comments:

The tendency is so easy to let it go and then to reinvent it... And then staff changeover and institutional memory is lost and people know this is somewhere on the file or sitting on the shelf, but...

Summary

So in terms of what organisations did to capture the experiences of their staff who visited Aceh, participants recall presenting to other staff or writing reports, but they were vague on what subsequently happened to the information. Many participants themselves struggled to recall what they might have learned. As with the wider learning forums, none of the participants could point to any specific gender-related learning to emerge within their organisations from their tsunami response activities in Aceh. Learning within organisations tends to be informal and ad hoc. As discussed in Chapter Two, such informal learning processes are important but on their own are insufficient to ensure lessons are properly learned. [40]

Barriers to Learning

Question: What, if any, obstacles to learning exist within the participant
        NGOs?

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[40] Hailey and James (2002).

Participants reveal a number of barriers to learning that exist within their organisations and across the sector, including: the level of staff turnover, a lack of resources to devote to learning activities; and the extent to which learning depends on the level of commitment by the programme director of the time.

1. Staff Turnover

The programme directors change, that's a significant thing of course because of learning, every time there is turnover you lose information.

Benfatto

[Staff turnover] is a huge problem. It's actually a sector wide problem in my opinion … So that is a structural problem for the NGO community.

Chiswell

The problem of staff turnover is identified in the literature on this subject as being one reason why organisations seem not to be able to capture learning and why they do not devote more resources to learning.[41]

2. Lack of Resources

Respondents comment on the lack of resources available to commit to learning. At the time of the tsunami it was unusual for NZ NGOs to have a full time humanitarian programme manager. Person A comments that when she went to Aceh the nature of her role meant she did not have much time to devote to learning activities.

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[41] See for example Richardson (2006).

At that stage I was doing the job only 20% of my time, so by the time I had filled the reporting requirements I had pretty much blown my time on it.

Person A

NZ humanitarian agencies were very much ... postbox, you put your cheque in here and we'll send it on type response. I was the first humanitarian programme manager for any NGO in NZ ... the government grant they used to get was $125,000 of which 1% could be used for admin. So you cannot build a structure that will learn in the humanitarian sector based on 1% admin...[Caritas NZ] had more capacity than just about everyone else to learn our lessons and we were pretty well swamped. OK, so how much did everyone else learn? ... Having dedicated humanitarian capacity is a bit of a luxury for an agency the size of Caritas. But what has also changed is that ... for the community as a whole there is now 3-5% for AM & E[42] within the new HAF guidelines and there's 5% allocation of grants for administration, so basically now there is human resource available to be able to do that type of learning.

Chiswell

In the case of the core of larger professional NZ NGOs [it] has gone beyond being mere letterboxes gathering public funds, a government subsidy added on and then it goes as a cheque more or less to international counterparts. There is far more genuine engagement to and fro including field visits ... You've still got overall small capability compared with the bigger international community.

Clarke

The extent to which NZ based NGOs are able to have an impact on the way programming happens is quite limited. Development and humanitarian professionals based with NZ NGOs here will certainly be

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[42] Appraisal, Monitoring and Evaluation.

heard in conversations with their international affiliates, but in terms of affecting programming on the ground we are quite a long way away from that.

<div align="right">Bird</div>

3.   Level of Leader Commitment

Benfatto states that evaluation in reference to gender is donor driven and it is something that depends to a certain extent on the programme director at the time as to how much they invest in it. This comment is consistent with the literature on organisational learning that stresses the importance of the leader when it comes to how well an organisation learns.[43]

Summary

These findings show that organisations have responded to the challenges and experiences of working in Aceh to ensure they are learning lessons at three different levels. First, NZ NGOs have participated (and continue to participate) in summits and conferences as part of their international networks and draw lessons from that source. Although the tsunami has contributed to policy changes at the international level in a number of organisations, no participants could identify any particular gender-related lessons at that level.

Second, NZ NGOs engage with each other and with NZAID to share information and learn lessons. Again, none of the participants were able to point specifically to any gender-related lessons.

Third, participant NGOs learn within their organisations, from their staff experiences. However, the findings show that they rely heavily on informal processes. Learning is not done systematically or formally except to the

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[43] See for example Hailey and James (2002).

extent that it is confined to annual review processes. No respondents were able to identify any gender-related lessons learned by their organisations.

Three main barriers to learning within organisations are identified: the level of staff turnover; the lack of resources; and the level of commitment to learning by the programme director.

These findings reflect the reality that NZ NGOs are primarily funding organisations and are consistent with comments that they have not traditionally had the resources to learn their own lessons from their own experiences.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

The international humanitarian response in Aceh after the tsunami has been criticised in relation to its lack of proper attention to gender issues, among other things. The criticism has come from a number of sources including donors and beneficiaries, particularly the women of Aceh. INGOs are accountable to both. Being accountable requires that organisations devote time and resources to actively learn lessons from the Aceh experience to ensure that they improve their future performance.

This research is not an assessment of the effectiveness of the gender policies of NZ NGOs or the extent to which they were or were not implemented in Aceh. Instead, it has sought to reveal and analyse some of the challenges and experiences that workers of NZ NGOs faced in post-tsunami Aceh in relation to gender issues and how those NGOs have responded to ensure lessons have been learned. Only five NGOs, out of the seventeen known to have been involved in some way in the tsunami response, have participated in this research. Therefore, the findings relate only to those five NGOs and cannot be more broadly applied.

To carry out this study three broad subject areas have been explored: gender and development; post-tsunami Aceh; and organisational learning.

Gender and Aceh

Consideration of gender issues is a crucial element of effective disaster response and sustainable development, and the widespread acknowledgement of its importance is reflected in the literature, in the numerous codes and charters that INGOs subscribe to and in those

organisations' own policies. However, despite over fifteen years of gender mainstreaming by INGOs, they continue to struggle to translate policies into practice.

One of the many reasons identified for the difficulty in implementing gender policies is that they are not sufficiently flexible or adaptable to the realities of the various local contexts in which INGO workers find themselves. Participants in this research comment that policies tend to be broad in nature and it takes time to appreciate and understand the local gender dynamics and issues and therefore how gender policies might be best applied in that context. Some also felt that gender, while important, was largely donor driven and was not necessarily always relevant or applicable to what organisations were trying to achieve on the ground in the short term.

It is widely recognised that major traumatic events like the Indian Ocean Tsunami create windows of opportunity for addressing gender inequalities and unless steps are taken to that effect from the outset of any disaster response, there is a risk that gender inequalities will become further entrenched. Gender policies need to go far beyond attending to the practical gender needs. They must seek to address long-term strategic needs by taking into account the underlying power structures that perpetuate inequalities. But, as this research has shown, in the urgency of an emergency situation like the initial days following the tsunami in Aceh, gender is seen as a luxury consideration and can easily become sidelined in the rush to deliver aid. While practical gender needs can be addressed, strategic gender needs cannot, because not only are they not recognised or well understood initially, but also there are simply not the resources available to devote to the more complex issues of underlying structural gender inequalities.

As things moved beyond the initial emergency in Aceh, gender inequalities became more apparent and were better understood in their cultural and religious contexts. However, as the issues emerged, the forces that impact most on gender inequalities and against which NGOs have to work, also gained prominence. For example, participants point to the stricter

implementation of Sharia law and the controlling tendencies of the military in the months following the tsunami as being factors that made it difficult to implement gender policies. Their presence restricted the ability of women to participate in the reconstruction process.

Another reason why organisations struggle to implement policies in practice is that staff are often insufficiently trained. Some of the respondents in this research commented on how difficult it was to draw enough staff into Aceh after the tsunami to cope with the level of need, and often they had to work with and rely on people, particularly technical experts, who had no experience with or understanding of the importance of gender considerations.

Although sometimes lack of resources is cited as a reason why gender is not given sufficient attention, in post-tsunami Aceh the extraordinary level of funding that was available to organisations was identified by a couple of respondents as actually contributing to the lack of rigour around gender standards that would normally be expected in a post-disaster environment. Because organisations did not have to compete for funds and because of the pressure on them to disburse funds quickly and show tangible results, gender standards were not adhered to.

In addition to the difficulties of implementation, there has also been a noticeable loss of momentum in the international humanitarian community around the issue of gender. This has been described as 'GAD fatigue', evidenced by the lack of commitment in terms of time and budget allocations within organisations to ensure it remains a paramount consideration. In light of the numerous reports criticising the overall international gender response in Aceh, and the specific challenges identified by participants in this research, it is notable that to date not a single lesson relating to gender has been drawn from NZ NGOs post-disaster experiences in Aceh. This research did not consider in any depth the level of commitment to gender within the participating organisations, but further research that involves a systematic assessment of how committed NZ NGOs are to the mainstreaming of gender

policies, looking at factors such as investment in staff training, policies and procedures, and budget allocations over time would be useful.

Organisational Learning

As noted above, accountability and learning go hand in hand. Learning is essential to an organisation's continued viability. Organisations need to ensure they learn lessons so that they are continuously improving their performance and not repeatedly making the same mistakes at the expense of those they are trying to help. To learn effectively, organisations need to put systems in place to ensure knowledge and experience is captured. Learning must be active and continuous.

The best opportunities for learning exist following a major disaster because the impetus is at its strongest and the issues are at the forefront of people's minds. In trying to determine whether any lessons have been learned from the tsunami, this research looked at what the responding organisations do to learn lessons. The research shows that learning comes from three main sources: the organisation's international affiliates as lessons are passed down; sharing learning among NGOs across the sector in New Zealand through a variety of fora; and learning within their own organisations.

NZ NGOs are traditionally fundraising organisations rather than implementing organisations, so they have tended to primarily learn the lessons of others, not having their own experiences to draw on. They pick up the wider lessons learned from their international affiliates. They also engage with other NGOs in New Zealand and share lessons that way. The NDRF[44] is one such open forum for shared learning. But as more organisations now have full time humanitarian programme managers and are developing their capacity to respond to humanitarian disasters they will increasingly be drawing lessons from their own experiences and will need to ensure they have systems in place for effective learning. This research has shown that the participating

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[44] Non-government Organisations Disaster Relief Forum

organisations currently do not have robust internal structures for systematic, continuous learning. Respondents identify staff turnover, lack of resources, and variable leadership commitment to learning as being three of the main barriers to learning within their organisations.

The impact of staff turnover on organisational learning and knowledge in NZ NGOs is suggested by a number of participants to be a significant problem for the sector. Further research into this issue would be useful to assess the actual extent and impact of it and to investigate ways losses to organisations in the form of knowledge and learned lessons can be mitigated.

Participants in this research were not able to recall any particular gender related lessons learned by them or their organisations as a result of their work in Aceh, except perhaps Chiswell's passing observation that the most successful projects in his experience tended to be those that were small in scale with lower levels of funding because they did not end up being controlled by men, and women were able to be actively involved in them. NZAID contributed to the TEC evaluation and recognises there were major failings around gender. It is currently developing its own Humanitarian Action Policy, which draws generally on lessons learned from the tsunami.

While this research has not revealed any specific gender-related lessons learned by NZ NGOs from post-tsunami Aceh, it has highlighted from an NZ NGO perspective the particular challenges and difficulties faced in that context.   If NZ NGOs continue to develop their humanitarian response capabilities and become increasingly operational in an international environment that is demanding better accountability from NGOs, it will be essential that they become better learning organisations as they draw more and more lessons from their own experiences.

Appendix 1: Interview Question Guide

<u>Fieldworkers</u>

1. When did you work in Aceh?

2. What was your role at that time?

3. Had your organisation worked in Aceh prior to the tsunami?

4. What relief/development activities were you engaged in there?

5. Were they the activities you went there to do?

6. Did your organisation have gender polices for implementation as part of your work?

7. If so, what was your experience of implementing them? What were the challenges to implementation?

8. If not, what was your experience of gender issues generally as they related to the work you were doing?

9. If you had gender policies to implement, were they able to be adapted to the local context as required?

10. Did you receive any gender training?

11. Did the demands of the context lead to you venture into activities outside your normal area of expertise?

12. Did you go through some kind of debriefing process upon your return to New Zealand?

13. Did you or your organisations learn any lessons in respect of gender?

<u>NGO Representatives</u>

1. When did your organisation work in Aceh?

2. Does your organisation have any history of working in Aceh?

3. How many personnel did you send to Aceh?

4. What relief/development activities was your organisation involved in there? Are they different from the usual types of work you do?

5. Did your organisation partner with any local organisations as part of its tsunami response?

6. Did your organisation have a gender policy when it went to Aceh?

7. How have you monitored the implementation of your gender policy?

8. How has your organisation responded to the experience of working in Aceh in terms of gender issues?

9. What do you see as the constraints to gender policy implementation in Aceh?

10. Have any changes been made to your gender policy or procedures as a result of your organisation's experience of working in Aceh?

11. How is your gender policy shaped? Is it set by the international parent organisation?

12. Did any of your staff receive gender training for their work in Aceh?

13. What has your organisation done to capture the experiences of the staff it sent to Aceh?

14. How does your organisation learn lessons generally?

15. What factors make learning difficult?

16. Have you learned any lessons relating to gender from Aceh?

<u>NZAID Staff</u>

1. What are the gender related challenges of working in Aceh from NZAID's point of view?

2. Is NZAID aware of any issues related to the implementation of gender policies in Aceh?

3. What has NZAID's response been to the criticisms of the international disaster relief response in Aceh, if any?

4. Does NZAID have a view about the performance of NZ NGOs in Aceh?

5. Does NZAID have a view about how gender policies can be implemented effectively in such an environment?

6. In NZAID's view, how good are NZ NGOs at learning? Are there good systems within organisations and across the sector?

7. Is NZAID aware of any lessons that have been learned in respect of gender?

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