Half full or half empty? Shelter after the Jogjakarta earthquake

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The international shelter response to the Jogjakarta earthquake in Indonesia in May 2006 is widely regarded as a success story, especially when compared with the response to the Indian Ocean tsunami 16 months earlier. This evaluation is largely in terms of the international aid system itself, which emphasises statistical measures of ‘success’ and internal coordination and efficiency. From the perspective of those closer to the ground, however, it was less successful, especially in terms of coordination and communication with and participation of local agencies and affected communities. This paper, by an aid worker resident in Jogjakarta and an anthropologist, examines the response from a perspective grounded both within and outside the aid system, local as well as global. It recognises the relative success of the response, but argues for an approach more grounded in local knowledge and responsive to local concerns, while also providing practical suggestions for improvement.

Keywords: aid, emergency, humanitarian response, Indonesia, local knowledge, relief

Introduction

The literature on humanitarian response to disasters consists largely of field reports and in-house evaluations by the agencies or groups of agencies involved. Unlike the literature on aid and development more generally, there are few critical, independent studies of specific responses to specific disasters. Of these even fewer attempt (a) to combine the perspectives of critical analysis by observers located outside the formal aid system with those based on the experience of people working inside the system, (b) to take into account a range of perspectives of actors across the spectrum of agencies, governments and affected communities, and (c) to approach responses in a manner that might be described as ethnographic, grounded in analysis of the everyday practice of the people involved (Fernando and Hillhorst, 2006), as distinct from studies at the level of theoretical principles or via quantitative survey methods. This paper attempts to do all three of these, in relation to the international and national response that unfolded in Jogjakarta, Indonesia, in the wake of the earthquake of 27 May 2006.

Both authors were involved in different ways. Dave Hodgkin was a resident of an affected village, but also has long experience in construction and humanitarian response, and hence became a key participant in the entire emergency shelter and reconstruction process. Graeme MacRae is an anthropologist with over 15 years research experience in Indonesia, passing familiarity with Jogjakarta going back to 1977.
and a working understanding of construction. He spent six weeks in Jogjakarta shortly after the earthquake, studying the international response. His impressions were of a system alarmingly disconnected from the local realities it was supposed to serve (MacRae, 2008). Hodgkin, on the other hand, saw a response that was in many respects faster, more efficient and more grounded in local realities than many previous responses, although he too saw room for improvement.

These differences of perception obviously reflect our different experiences, positions in the process and professional interests but also the different agendas and priorities of academic and industry modes of knowledge production. But they are not entirely reducible to these and we recognised the truth in each other’s versions. We believe these differences of perception are inherent in complex processes such as large humanitarian responses and should be seen not as obstacles to understanding but as potential sources of valuable insight.

When we met again in mid-2007, with reconstruction well advanced and the general picture becoming clearer, we had a series of conversations identifying, exploring, clarifying and eventually attempting to build on the common ground in our understandings. This paper arises out of these conversations, which began in Hodgkin’s house in the heart of the affected area and were continued over subsequent months by e-mail and again with meetings in mid-2008 and 2009. It works at several levels and we attempt to achieve several tasks.

First, we document an outline of one of the largest and most rapid humanitarian shelter responses ever. Second, we critically analyse the successes and failures of this response and the reasons for them. Third, we make some practical recommendations for future responses. At another level, however, our views reflect a perennial gap between the perceptions of engaged practitioners of aid or development and supposedly less (or perhaps differently) engaged academic analysts of such processes (Morris and Bastin, 2004). This gap is a source of frustration and not uncommon miscommunication between the holders of these two types of knowledge and there have been frequent calls, from both sides of the fence, for ways of bridging the gap (Lewis and Mosse, 2006; Pitt, 1976). A deeper aim of this paper is just this gap-bridging, through a process of dialogue that seeks less to smooth out differences than to bring them together in productive ways. Our method and the form of our paper are thus somewhat experimental.

On the one hand we offer a critical analysis of experience from the field: the familiar ‘lessons-learned’ kind but unconstrained by the conventions and politics of the in-house genre. On the other hand it is conceived as a work of ethnography, assembled out of several elements: first, a brief ethnography of the international system in action (MacRae, 2008); second, some unsystematic ethnographic knowledge of affected villages; third, a kind of auto-ethnography of (mostly Hodgkin’s) experience as a partial insider in both, and; finally, a series of interviews with local people playing a range of key roles in both local and international agencies. We use the term ethnography not in the narrow sense of a small-scale field study, but in the deeper sense of ‘drawing from the learning experiences of the ethnographer’ (Tsing, 2006, p. xi) and thus ‘. . . as much an intellectual (and moral) positionality. . . as. . . a bodily process
in space and time’ (Ortner, 2006, p. 42). But our approach is perhaps even better understood as ‘para-ethnography’ in the sense that Bjarnesen (2006, pp. 11–12, citing Holmes and Marcus, 2005) uses it, to refer to a mode of knowledge production based on collaboration between people with different but mutually recognisable areas of expertise and a common interest in improvement of practice.

We begin with a general overview of the international humanitarian response system, followed by an account of its application in Jogjakarta, a closer analysis of the shelter component of the response and brief discussions of the perceptions of different categories of local people. Our conclusions consist of a set of recommendations for practice as well as some reflections on the working of the system as a whole.

The international humanitarian response system

The international humanitarian response system (IHRS) is a term we use to refer to a body of resources and knowledge embodied in a range of organisations, institutions and individuals.2 These are globally dispersed, but are routinely mobilised to provide emergency aid and recovery in situations of disaster anywhere in the world. It has been argued that ‘there is no such thing as a humanitarian system’, only a ‘complex . . . of shifting actors, diffuse boundaries, partly conflicting interests . . . high diversity . . . and unpredictable outcomes’ (Fernando and Hillhorst, 2006, p. 296). While this may be true at the level of daily practice on the ground, there is also, at a more general level, a discernible system that includes a range of United Nations (UN) agencies, global organisations such as the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) and Oxfam, a host of smaller global, national and local organisations (Benthall, 1993, pp. 13–26), a number of coordinating bodies such as the (UN-initiated and UN-led) Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), and specialised information and resource institutions such as ReliefWeb, the Sphere Project and Shelter Centre.3

When a disaster occurs, anywhere in the world, some or most of these organisations are mobilised, more or less independently. They arrive at the site, each with their own agendas, information, interpretations, resources, budgets, priorities, modes of operation and plans. Coordination of these into an integrated response is presumed to be desirable, but it does not happen automatically—it requires systems and procedures. Once on site, this system also enters into a pre-existing field of local actors and geographical, political, economic and physical constraints. These obviously include the people affected by the disaster, but also the government, often involving multiple levels and departments, the armed forces and local civil society organisations. All these are in turn situated in their own cultural, historical and political contexts, which are often complex and contested. So, when the IHRS, multi-layered and globally dispersed in itself, arrives at the site of a disaster, it takes on new forms and enters into new cultural, linguistic and political contexts where it must form working relationships with a whole new range of actors. All of these factors are then subject to rapid and often unpredictable change as events unfold and policies, strategies and practices develop.
This description, brief and simplified as it is, suggests considerable complexity—multidimensional and rapidly changing—not easily reduced to simple formulae or models, let alone conducive to easy decision making. Not surprisingly, therefore, many of the resources of the IHRS are devoted to collection and analysis of information, liaison, coordination and planning designed to comprehend and manage this complexity. These activities form the core content of meetings and communications and consequently tend to dominate the world-view of staff in IHRS agencies. The literature of field reports and evaluations also tends to be dominated by such concerns. Escobar (1995, p. 146) has referred to this as the production of a ‘documentary reality’, which may be necessary to gain a grasp of the situation but tends to take on a life of its own, often overshadowing the primary reality it is supposed to reflect.

In such an environment direct contact with affected populations, subtle understandings of local cultural and political contexts, and development of close working relationships with local partner organisations do not come easily and tend to take second place in the priorities of agencies, their staff and especially the donors to whom they are answerable. As the work is divided between organisations, an overview of the whole process becomes increasingly difficult to achieve, let alone keep in focus. These, we suggest, are some of the reasons why there is a need for studies by professional researchers, with local knowledge and experience and the linguistic and cultural skills needed to access the views of local people, as well as access to other actors.

The cluster system

The international management of disasters has long been divided into ‘sectors’ such as health, education, water and sanitation. This division of labour follows a logic already embedded in the global aid and development system and reflected in the UN’s system of specialised agencies. Disaster response was divided into sector working groups with different UN agencies responsible for assessment, coordination and implementation in each sector. Overall coordination was then undertaken by UN/OCHA (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) under the guidance of the in-country Humanitarian Coordinator (often the Country Coordinator of the UN).

In practice, however, reality does not necessarily follow this logic. There are usually cross-cutting issues such as gender and protection (of the vulnerable), as well as complexities created by the interaction between sectors. The potential for confusion, overlaps and gaps is considerable. From the point of view of local communities the response is often divided up in ways that do not fit either their experience of the disaster itself or, more importantly, the day-to-day reality of their recovery process.

By the 1990s many organisations had become disillusioned with the inherent contradictions and practical weaknesses of this system. This led to the establishment in 1992 of the IASC representing most of the larger agencies, with the aim of improving the system. In Asia the problems came to a head in the response to the East Timor crisis in 1999 when, for the first time, the UN took complete control of a whole country as well as controlling most of the funds.
In Aceh, Indonesia, after the Indian Ocean tsunami, the opposite situation prevailed, when the unprecedented global outpouring of funds saw individual nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) receive larger, prompter sources of funds than the UN system. Also the political complexities of the Militarised Zone of Aceh meant that the UN and its coordination system had less funding and power than other agencies. The agencies were not dependent on the UN and were in fact competing for beneficiaries rather than funds. In the scramble to spend, coordination was largely overlooked. Not surprisingly this environment of competition and undercoordination resulted in gross misspending and poor outcomes. But it also led to some useful innovations.

Ironically, when the UN-led sectoral approach collapsed, agencies were forced to coordinate regionally. Local communities were effectively empowered by the fact that agencies were competing for their custom. Coordination meetings were held at the level of local villages and with considerable community participation. This practical on-the-ground solution provided a de-facto alternative model to the failing sectoral approach, for the Indonesian government as well as the international agencies. These visible failures and alternative approaches prompted a comprehensive review by the IASC in 2006, which led to a commitment to reform of the coordination process. A major outcome of this was a shift from sectors to clusters (of agencies). The cluster system was designed to be less rigid, hierarchical and UN-centric. Agencies were expected to organise themselves under leadership agreed on through the IASC so that ‘. . . strategy is developed jointly based upon the majority view of the cluster membership and. . . the cluster Lead is accountable to the cluster as a whole’ (UN, 2006, p. 4). The agency leading each cluster was chosen by its member agencies and the person leading the cluster acted independently of his/her own agency. The formal role of the UN was limited to coordination between clusters, centralised collection, management and dissemination of information, and liaison between the cluster system and national government. Other UN agencies operated like any other agency, as ordinary participants in their respective clusters (except where they were the nominated lead agency). The new system was tested with some success in the Pakistan earthquake response and refined further in Jogjakarta.

**What happened in Jogjakarta?**

On 27 May 2006, an earthquake of magnitude 6.3 on the Richter scale struck the province of Jogjakarta about 25 kilometres south of the city, in the centre of Java, killing nearly 6,000 people and leaving more than 20,000 injured. Around 300,000 houses were totally destroyed with a further 300,000 severely damaged. This, combined with damage and destruction to both commercial and government structures, resulted in one of the world’s worst recorded disasters in terms of damage to buildings. In the months that followed the IHRS, along with government, community and local organisations (many of them faith-based), provided emergency response and recovery assistance to the affected communities. A year and a half later, most
people had been rehoused, communities were functioning and livelihoods were being rebuilt.

The worst of the damage was in relatively poor rural and urban-fringe areas south, east and north-east of the city. Immediate assistance came mostly from other communities in the area, who helped with search and rescue and clean-up, as well as food, water and other supplies. Local and national NGOs also mobilised quickly to provide water, other essential supplies and emergency shelter. A few international agencies already had offices or staff in Jogjakarta in anticipation of an eruption of Mt Merapi, 30 kilometres inland from the city. Others arrived rapidly, many direct from Aceh where they had large offices, and within a few weeks there were well over 100 agencies present. Some were specialists in humanitarian relief, some were not. Some had experience in Indonesia, some did not. Some stayed only for short periods during the emergency phase, while others were still delivering shelter, livelihood and other development programmes a year later.

Many of the agencies and staff involved came directly from Pakistan or Afghanistan with experience of the cluster system. Others came from post-tsunami Aceh, with its lessons fresh in their minds. For all parties, however, the Jogjakarta response was conducted in the shadow of the much-publicised failures of the tsunami response, leading to a generally cautious approach. But there were key differences, including:

1) A higher proportion of skilled and experienced local staff and also an increase in the proportion of international staff with in-country experience and in some cases various degrees of cultural and linguistic competence.

2) A consensus that T-shelter (transitional shelter) was an essential step but that they had left it too late in Aceh. This was in marked contrast to the conclusion of the Indonesian government—based on widespread local dissatisfaction and international criticism of their military-style ‘barracks’ approach to transitional shelter—that transitional shelter was a dirty word, never to be repeated. Consequently the government opted for a ‘one-step’ strategy in Jogjakarta, stepping (at least in theory) straight from the largely international agency supplied tarpaulins and tents to government-funded permanent housing.

3) The problems of coordination in Aceh were such a bad experience for many agencies, and attracted such negative publicity, that they were much more willing to work together in Jogjakarta. Limitation of funds also limited competition and forced a more united approach. The organisation and coordination of this system became a significant focus of the attention of senior agency officials and of their subsequent self-evaluations (for example, Manfield, 2007b; UN/OCHA, 2006a, 2006b).

This was the complex and changing institutional environment in which the Jogjakarta response unfolded. Despite initial concerns about water, sanitation and health, shelter emerged as the main problem and the major focus of the relief effort, with a later shift of focus to livelihoods. Recent memories of the slow response in Aceh and the fact that the rainy season was at most only four months away added further urgency to the focus on shelter.
The first five (and especially the first three) months of the response were dominated by providing emergency assistance of various kinds and planning for temporary shelter to see people through the wet season. During this period planning was hindered by uncertainty as to what the government’s response would be, despite initial promises of about USD 3,000 per household. After some months, the government agreed to provide a total of some USD 300 million of assistance, much of it in the form of cash grants of about USD 1,500 to households to rebuild their homes. But this package was tied to specified forms of permanent construction rather than temporary shelter. This led to serious concerns about how much reconstruction could realistically take place before the monsoon season.

In October 2006, a group of international donors (the European Commission and the governments of the Netherlands, United Kingdom, Canada, Denmark and Finland) formed the Java Reconstruction Fund (JRF) with funds of around USD 80 million. The JRF was administered by the World Bank who chose for ‘reasons of speed of implementation’ to work only through their existing system of implementing partners—the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the Community Housing Foundation (JRF/UN, 2007, pp. 28–29). Their priorities were provision of additional T-shelter, earthquake-resistant design assistance, supplementation of the government’s reconstruction programme for vulnerable groups, and subsequently livelihood rebuilding.

As funding became clearer, and shelter remained the priority, the IHRS focused on T-shelter while the government focused on its permanent shelter programme. In the ensuing six months 75,000 further T-Shelters were built while the government rolled out assistance for 258,000 permanent houses.

The shelter cluster, which is the main focus of our experience and research, was by far the largest one. A brief review of the modus operandi of this cluster will give some idea of how the system worked in practice.

**The shelter and reconstruction cluster in Jogjakarta**

As the sheer scale of the damage became apparent, and with the wet season looming, shelter quickly became the main focus of the response. The emergency shelter cluster was established within days of the earthquake, involving more than 60 member organisations lead by the IFRC. Over the first three months, they distributed more than 350,000 tarpaulins and tents as well as 45,000 toolkits, reaching at least 300,000 households in over 750 villages. This amounted to more than 80 per cent of all households who had lost their homes. As an official report (UN/OCHA, 2007, p. 12) noted, this reflected ‘considerable progress in accountability and coordinated response from previous shelter responses’. In September, coordination of the cluster shifted to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

By this stage it was becoming apparent that international funding for more permanent reconstruction was seriously inadequate and there seemed little reason for confidence in the government’s early promises of generous funding. Time was also
running out before the rains, so a strategy emerged of ‘T-shelters’—small, easily constructed houses of light, semi-permanent materials. The usual international model for such shelters is packages of timber framing, corrugated iron roofing and sometimes plywood walling. But people with more local knowledge, including locally-based expatriate aid workers, local engineers and architects and even the Sultan of Jogjakarta argued, for cultural and environmental reasons as much as technical ones, for bamboo-framed structures with woven bamboo cladding and temporary tarpaulin roofs over which tiles could later be laid. These were essentially engineered versions of the simple buildings in which less affluent people have always housed themselves, their cattle and their small business enterprises (see Figure 1).

When central government finally did commit funds they were for permanent, earthquake-resistant housing only. This took some pressure from the IHRS but it also created new concerns about:

a) how long government funds would take to emerge;
b) how much building could be done in the rain;
c) how quickly the supply chain could adapt to such a massive demand for materials;
d) how ‘earthquake resistant’ new houses would be if people rushed into reconstruction;
e) the conflict between peoples’ need to return to work and to rebuild their houses;
f) whether the existing emergency shelter would see people through until permanent houses were built;
g) the health risks created by inadequate housing (especially respiratory illness and diarrhoea);
In addition to these practical problems, this divergence of strategies created a diplomatic and public relations issue. This was resolved by repackaging the international T-shelter programme as ‘Roof First’—the first stage of a phased process of reconstruction of permanent houses. The shelter cluster also managed to persuade the government to allow communities to use the first phase of their assistance to build temporary shelters from materials that could later be re-used in permanent houses. In fact unseasonably dry weather, slow delivery of government funds and rapid supply of T-Shelter meant that most people did use their funds to commence permanent reconstruction.

The glass half full: what worked and why

Official reports on this response and the opinions of experienced aid workers both emphasise its relative success and efficiency, compared to previous responses and especially to that of post-tsunami Aceh (Manfield, 2007b, p. 10; JRF/UN, 2007, p. 12). There is substantial objective basis to this opinion.

First, in quantitative terms, more people were sheltered in a much shorter period: 85,000 temporary shelters and ‘core’ houses within 12 months, as well as the emergency tarpaulins (UN/OCHA, 2007, p. 4). More importantly, though, delivery rates were much higher at earlier stages than in most previous emergencies.

Second, the shelter was of more appropriate design in cultural, environmental and technical terms and was arguably of better quality. The majority of T-shelter designs had braced bamboo frames, walls of woven split bamboo (gedeg) and tarpaulin roofs that could be covered later with other more permanent materials, usually traditional clay tiles (genteng), which were often included in permanent housing packages. This was a significant achievement in terms of the incorporation of local knowledge and practice into an international response.

Third, these improvements were achieved despite much lower levels of funding than in Aceh. In other words, the success is even more striking in terms of cost-effectiveness. At the same time it appears to have avoided most of the gross failures that dogged the entire Aceh response.

Fourth, there were higher levels of community participation at all stages and in all aspects of the response. For example, meetings of the shelter cluster were often, especially in the later stages, carried out in both Indonesian and English, with translation both ways. Some international NGOs (INGOs), especially ones such as Oxfam, which were already established in Jogjakarta, ran their programmes through local NGOs (LNGOs). Others often recruited experienced staff from LNGOs, a practice which, on the one hand, provides international agencies with local experience and cultural understanding, but on the other can seriously undermine LNGO capacity. In addition, LNGO forums and a victims’ advocacy organisation (Suara) played important roles in ensuring that community opinions were not overlooked. Not surprisingly, this level of participation led to higher levels of community satisfaction and lower levels of dissatisfaction than those recorded in Aceh.
Some of the reasons for this success are obvious, others less so. Perhaps most obvious of all is the fact that the disaster occurred close to a major city that itself remained relatively undamaged. Similarly, essential infrastructure of roads, bridges, telecommunication services, water and sanitation remained relatively intact. Establishing bases, collecting data and the logistics of procurement, storage, implementation and communication were thus much less difficult than they often can be.

Less obvious was the existing social infrastructure, at all levels of society. The death toll, although tragically large in absolute terms, did not seriously undermine the human resource base—from builders and suppliers, to community leaders and intellectuals—needed for recovery. Likewise, although psychological trauma was significant at the individual level, it was not of a scale and depth to seriously affect the ability of whole communities to function effectively.

Another important factor was government, at all levels, evident in the differing responses and results in different areas. The provincial government of the Special Area of Jogjakarta (DIY) was strong, relatively free of corruption (at least by Indonesian standards) and credible in the eyes of the public, as were most lower levels of government in DIY. The fact that everybody at every level was affected by the disaster also led to real commitment to recovery. In the neighbouring province of Central Java, however, these factors were less in evidence, and this was reflected in slower and poorer recovery overall and confirmed by subsequent enquiries into official corruption.

Jogjakarta is also a centre of higher education, with dozens of universities and technical institutes. Consequently considerable technical, cultural and management expertise was available locally. In addition to these intellectual resources, Jogjakarta has arguably the largest and strongest civil society resources in Indonesia, in the form of hundreds of NGOs, often closely linked to universities. It is also home to the national or regional offices of several INGOs, such as Oxfam. Many of these had disaster response capacities developed in Aceh. Furthermore, they had established forums and networks of inter-organisation communication and cooperation (Hadiniwata, 2003).

The affected villages themselves also had significant social resources. Javanese villages are renowned for their traditions of solidarity, democracy and collective labour (gotong-royong) as well as a wide range of economic self-help organisations, women’s groups and youth groups (Bowen, 1986; Lont, 2005). All played significant roles in the recovery process. While these traditions remain strong in the more rural villages around Jogjakarta, they are less so in peri-urban areas where they have been undermined and partly replaced by more dispersed urbanised forms of sociality. This too had a noticeable effect on the relative speed and success of recovery.

These social resources of rural villages are matched by human and material ones such as widespread practical skills, ready availability of materials such as bamboo, timber and stone, as well as space for removing rubble or rebuilding houses. Land ownership also tends to be more straightforward and less contested than in urban areas, where people are often tenants. All of these factors, as well as the reluctance of both government and international agencies to support rental housing or enter into complex ownership issues, meant that rural areas tended to receive more support and thus to recover more successfully than urban or peri-urban areas.
Leadership is another important factor in the capacity of local communities to respond (Bankoff, 2005). In Jogjakarta a strong base of local leadership survived the disaster. While leadership styles and qualities vary considerably, our experience suggests that local leadership is often (although by no means universally) fairly strong, intelligent, responsible and honest with a real basis in popular trust. Variation between communities in terms of leadership and solidarity was also closely related to rates and success of recovery. All these factors were compounded by the fact that INGOs tend to keep working and expand their operations in communities they find easy to work with and correspondingly reduce their commitments in more difficult ones.

This array of local resources provided a much stronger foundation for emergency response and reconstruction than could be found in many other parts of the world. Indeed if one had to choose a place in Indonesia with the best potential for recovery, Jogjakarta would the prime candidate. While some resources already lay at hand, however, others came from outside: external factors played an important role in Jogjakarta’s recovery.

First, government, at all levels, took the disaster seriously. This was no doubt partly in reaction to the criticism of their performance in Aceh, but it also reflects the position Jogjakarta holds in the official imagination of the nation, as the heartland of traditional culture, and in the history of the nation itself. The Sultan of Jogjakarta is a major figure in this imagination as well as a major player on the national political stage. Consequently the government, after a shaky start, provided substantial funding and fairly competent leadership and management (especially in DIY as noted above). As a result, the impossible task initially facing the IHRS was transformed into the more manageable one of bridging gaps.

Second, although the financial resources dedicated to Jogjakarta recovery were initially low, the IHRS came better equipped than usual in other respects. Many of the agencies and staff, local as well as international, came from Aceh, with hard lessons learned but also fresh experience and, in a few cases, useful levels of linguistic, cultural and political knowledge.

Third, the use of the cluster system was widely recognised as a success. Among other improvements, the larger, better resourced INGOs, and especially UN agencies, did not dominate to the extent that was common previously. Consequently there was more sense of ownership by all participants, local as well as international. This in turn contributed to more effective coordination. Improved coordination was widely seen as a contributing factor to better performance as a whole (Manfield, 2007b, pp. 10, 18).

**The glass half empty: what could have been better?**

Despite the widespread sense of having ‘got it right’, not all parties were entirely satisfied with the process. Participants in and observers of the process have all identified gaps between the work of the IHRS system and realities on the ground and have argued, on the basis of comparisons with successful local projects, for more
locally-based, smaller-scale approaches (for example, MacRae, 2008). Similarly, LNGO workers and community members have expressed concerns about aspects of the IHRS (discussed in the following section).

The public relations machine(s) of the IHRS of course paint a rosy picture, which downplays any such problems. INGO staff vary in their assessments. Some, especially younger, less experienced ones, or those from agencies whose modes of operation tend to bring them into less contact with the realities on the ground, accept this official version surprisingly uncritically and judge the success of their operations primarily in terms of the internal logic of the IHRS. At the other extreme, some of those with the longest and most diverse experience are disillusioned with the whole system, which they see as being governed by the logic of the donors and bureaucrats rather than that of the people they are ostensibly there to assist. Others occupy intermediate positions, recognising both the relative success but also, at least privately, shortcomings that point to weaknesses in the system. These weaknesses are the focus of this section.

Despite improved coordination within the clusters themselves, coordination between components of the larger process appeared less successful. Neither cluster decision making nor inter-cluster coordination provided much space or opportunity for participation by local actors—neither NGOs nor government representatives, let alone local communities. This was especially so in the early emergency phase, when rapid deployment was the priority, but it remained so in the later phases when the need for community participation was greater and there was less excuse for such failure.

One aspect, as important symbolically as practically, was the dominant use of English as the medium of discussion and information sharing in cluster meetings. Interpreters were often available, but this slowed down already long and arduous meetings, so many agencies chose not to use this service and important documents were often translated later and distributed electronically. This lack of commitment to real-time translation effectively limited the participation of those who spoke little or no English as well as inhibiting the contribution of more fluent non-native speakers. On the other hand, LNGO forums and government agencies did little to provide translations for non-speakers of Indonesian in their meetings—both for reasons of resourcing and because of nationalistic sentiments and general distrust of foreign aid—ironically leaving the foreigners in the dark for a change. As a result, few foreigners attended LNGO forum meetings while few nationals actively participated (although many attended) at INGO meetings. This linguistic fault-line undoubtedly weakened coordination between local and international efforts. The limited (mostly electronic) provision of bi-lingual documents as the process developed improved this situation somewhat, though on the whole it was left to key individuals from either side with cross-cultural and cross-linguistic knowledge to bridge the gap by attending meetings on both sides. Although easily discounted as a minor issue, the continuing lack of recognition of the importance of language barriers and the lack of funding for real-time translation as part of the global cluster coordination system would seem to reflect an underlying lack of commitment to local participation in the process.
The interface and relationship between the IHRS and the labyrinth of levels and agencies of the Indonesian government was often unclear to foreigners and locals alike. This became a major source of difficulty and frustration for international agencies, especially those responsible for coordination. Constantly changing and often unclear government policy and practice added to the difficulties of coordination. This was very obvious in cluster meetings in the early months, but became less so as working relationships were established.

Both these shortcomings reflect the point made previously (MacRae, 2008) that the majority of IHRS staff, whatever their qualifications and experience in terms of aid, were seriously under-equipped in terms of local knowledge and language. In the cultural heartland of Indonesia, where fine distinctions of etiquette and subtleties of communication matter, this lack of cultural awareness seriously hindered cooperation.

A further weakness of coordination and participation, but in the opposite direction, was caused by the lack of commitment to the cluster system on the part of some major funding agencies. While some participated regularly and some sporadically, others did not participate at all.

Another complication flowed from the temporal phasing that cuts across the sectoral/cluster division of labour. In Jogjakarta, the response moved formally from emergency to early recovery in September. At this stage UNDP took over leadership of the early recovery cluster, which combined shelter and livelihoods. UNDP works from a standpoint of development rather than humanitarian response and assumes (not unreasonably) that development principles need to be built into humanitarian responses from the beginning. They also operate on an ideological/diplomatic principle of supporting governments rather than imposing agendas of their own. In practice, however, these principles are not always compatible with the urgent needs of humanitarian response. Even at the early recovery stage in Jogjakarta, they tended to cut across and even undermine the directions and work programmes that clusters had already established. The slow and cumbersome UNDP procedures and protocols also created significant delays in T-shelter programmes.

These shortcomings can be viewed in different ways: in terms of what was achieved or what might have been—a glass half full or half empty. But it is important to remember that both are views from within a system that has its own priorities and dynamics. Other parties see the glass in different ways, or perhaps even see a different glass. Some of these views will be discussed below. What has been reported here, however, also provides a basis for recommendations to improve the system yet again.

The view from inside the glass: locals in the international system

The views discussed so far are those of international members of the international system. These form the basis of this essay, but they are obviously not the only views.
Thousands of local people were also involved in various capacities, of which three are of particular interest here: those working in LNGOs, LNGOs working in partnership with INGOs, and local people employed directly in the IHRS. They ranged from battle-hardened and world-weary veterans of the LNGO/activist scene, to recent graduates who picked up well-paid jobs in international agencies. Not surprisingly their views reflected this range of positions.  

At one extreme were a pair of rather angry young men from one of the local inter-NGO forums. They questioned MacRae’s motivation for interviewing them but then, once satisfied, had plenty to say and were not afraid to criticise the international system. Unsurprisingly, their main criticisms concerned perceived failures of the IHRS to communicate adequately and consult with local partners: ‘Why didn’t they partner more with local NGOs—and when they did, why not more equal sharing and genuine flexibility?’ The worst cases, in their opinion, were some of the biggest agencies, using JRF funds, who declined to work with local partner organisations but recruited local staff into their own organisations and used them as the frontline workers to carry out predetermined projects in a top-down manner. They described this as ‘aid by force’. In addition, and perhaps partly as a result, such agencies were not open to local input and were not flexible about adjusting to local needs. The young men cited the example of the JRF T-shelter programme: the idea and design were fine, but by the time it was rolled out, the situation had changed and what most people really needed was cement, sand and reinforcing steel, not bamboo and gedeg. They received this feedback clearly from local communities and tried to feed it into the IHRS system via various channels—informal, government or UNDP—but the agencies concerned were reluctant to hear, or if they did, the system was too inflexible to change. Some INGOs justified this approach by claiming to be ‘local’ on the basis of having local office and local staff, and thus not needing local partners.

In more personal terms, these men saw INGO employees as working in their offices then going home, but never going to the villages—talking more than doing and knowing next to nothing about local realities. In their opinions, the best examples among the INGOs were some of the smaller ones with the smallest budgets, who asked people what they really needed, planned accordingly and had no choice but to rely on local partners to deliver it. This was an extreme view, rooted partly in a fierce nationalistic pride and sensitivity to any hint of foreign domination, which has flourished since the end of the Suharto regime. At the other extreme, ironically, was one of the predecessors of these young men in the same forum, who had also worked at the interface between local and international NGOs throughout the response. Initially he shared his local colleagues’ criticisms of the IHRS, but on reflection he was beginning to see such views as problems of perception as much as reality. He now saw the doubts of IHRS members about the capacity, professional standards and accountability of LNGOs as more justified, because of real practical issues such as inadequate internet access, lack of professional training or standards, and reliance on enthusiasm and
commitment rather than professional skills supported by professional salaries. Consequently, there were major problems involved in coordinating more than 200 groups, all with their own agendas. In retrospect he sees the IHRS as having genuinely tried to include the LNGOs, but the locals as having not taken up the offer, partly because of the prejudice referred to above, but also because of real problems resulting from the dominant use of non-local language.¹⁹

Between these extremes lay a spectrum of intermediate positions, among which several recurrent themes stood out:

- A consensus that the Jogjakarta response worked better than previous ones, especially post-tsunami Aceh.
- A tension between the requirements of INGOs in terms of transparency, accountability and administrative procedures and real urgent needs on the ground, especially during the emergency phase.
- The problem of international agencies who bypassed coordination systems and worked directly with communities without understanding broader contexts, and consequently made mistakes such as dispersing aid inequitably. While working through local partners is the obvious solution to these kinds of problems, there was a recognition that this raises other problems, such as uncertainty about the capacity of LNGOs.
- The greatest problems of coordination that occurred not within groups but between the three main groups involved—INGOs, LNGOs and the government. This was expressed less in claims that the IHRS was not listening or was difficult to deal with and more in the details of process and practice such as, ‘Why do the INGOs insist on having their meetings in hotels and other upmarket places rather than government offices, which are supposedly where legitimate authority lies and where everyone is on a more-or-less even footing and are close to the communities involved? This would strengthen (and would be seen to support) empowerment of local government.’²⁰ Or simply, ‘Why were their meetings always in English only?’
- The similar, but more general, observation that IHRS meetings did not sufficiently integrate local government and civil society—an imbalance of power reflecting an imbalance of resources.²¹
- A recognition that international staff brought essential experience, and knew what needed to happen, but were overly-focused on speed and consequently unable or unwilling to see or acknowledge longer-term factors, such as the value of community participation, the social dimensions of housing or the need for adjustment of international standards to local conditions.
- A tendency of the IHRS to focus on the more obvious, visible, material aspects of recovery and development, such as shelter, to the detriment of less obvious but equally important needs such as livelihoods and sustainable development.²²
- That INGOs tended to have agendas determined more by their own ideologies and the priorities of donors than the needs of recipients. Consequently programmes
could easily get out of step with community needs. This was exacerbated by inflexibility of funding and programme regimes that prevented them being adjusted to real needs on the ground.

- A perception that international staff saw themselves as superior, despite a lack of the local knowledge and language skills that would enable them to be more truly useful. This led one senior LNGO worker to suggest that while there was indeed a need for capacity building programmes, this need was greater for INGOs than for local ones.
- Other suggestions included a system of local/international counterparts at every level—that is, a genuine system of partnership: paying local staff salaries commensurate with their real value; providing LNGOs with the resources they need to do their jobs properly; and a better system for handover when INGOs leave the scene.

These perceptions do not radically contradict those within the international system, albeit expressed in different terms and with different emphases. They seem to reinforce the recognition that while coordination and communication within clusters and within the whole IHRS were, in general, fairly successful, those between the international and local sectors were less so. They also repeat long-held perceptions of many within the LNGO movement of a deep lack of understanding of local conditions on the part of the IHRS and its unwillingness to engage seriously with local knowledge. On the basis of previous research (MacRae, 2008) we would add that if this is how the IHRS appears to local people with whom it works, it must appear even more distant to local communities at the receiving end of assistance.23

Local community perceptions

It is beyond the scope of this paper, and indeed our mandate, to speak for local communities. While we have not conducted systematic research on these questions, we do have sufficient anecdotal evidence from our own experience (especially Hodgkin) to make the following general observations. Throughout the process local communities were, on the one hand, grateful for whatever assistance they received and reluctant to criticise those who sought to help them. And on the other hand, they were only too able to see the weaknesses in the system. As the response slowly unfolded in the months after the earthquake, many of them waited and wondered where all the aid workers were and why nothing was happening. They likewise became increasingly sceptical of the government’s ability or willingness to fulfill its early promises of assistance. In fact, it was only when this money finally did materialise that the rebuilding started in earnest.24

Recommendations for practice

While the issues discussed above are obviously complex and not necessarily amenable to quick-fix solutions, we have identified several key areas in which we believe relatively
simple and inexpensive practical measures could significantly improve the effectiveness of the system in meeting its objectives.

1. Inclusion of local actors

The present system (notwithstanding the obvious improvements of the cluster system) is designed and managed by the IASC, which includes no representatives of NGOs, communities or social actors. As such it focuses on the coordination needs of international actors, with the implicit assumption that the bulk of work is undertaken by them, with NGOs working under their direction. This simplistic view fails to recognise that the bulk of humanitarian work is actually undertaken by local communities with the support and assistance of local organisations, community groups and government. While we have no single recommendation that addresses this problem directly, it is implicit in all the sub-problems and recommendations below.

2. Language

One of the largest and most obvious problems was the lack of a common shared language and an effective system for bridging this gap.

Recommendation

The creation of an independent global disaster response translation service as an essential component of the cluster system in non-English-speaking countries. Such an agency would need to be adequately resourced to provide:

a. Simultaneous real-time translations for all coordination meetings, within the cluster system, NGO forums or government.

b. Translation, in both directions, of all essential documents, including meeting minutes.

To be effective, such an agency would need core equipment and a core pool of multilingual staff, with a global database of translators and pre-established networks of regional translation services.

3. Relationships with governments

In Jogjakarta, OCHA had to divert significant resources to negotiating with the government and critical time was lost as a result.

Recommendation

Pre-disaster negotiations with national and provincial governments so that OCHA is involved at a higher level in the decision-making process and is better positioned to integrate cluster leads into government meetings. This needs to happen globally, but with appropriate local variations. In the case of Indonesia, OCHA needs a mandate to be involved in the design and implementation of new disaster risk reduction legislation.
4. Capacity building and knowledge transfer

INGOs did little to build the capacity of LNGOs while they were present. This left LNGOs under-equipped to continue after the INGOs left.

Recommendation

Systematic building of stronger partnership arrangements between INGOs and LNGOs. This obviously becomes more realistic in the post-emergency phase, when there is more time for developing real sustainable relationships and mutual capacity building. A commitment on the part of INGOs to provide ongoing support after they leave would be an added bonus.

5. Cluster leadership

Leadership of a cluster is a complex task requiring a range of specialised skills not necessarily acquired through regular experience in the IHRS.

Recommendation

Clearer terms of reference and specialised training for cluster leaders, which emphasise:

a. ‘Leadership’, especially regarding the difference between driving a cluster and steering/guiding/facilitating one.

b. Coordination, facilitation, negotiation and participation skills.

c. Capacity building and training in international standards for both LNGOs and government.

d. Systematic inclusion of local actors in the cluster process.

6. Shelter cluster training

Shelter is in many cases a very important cluster, often using the bulk of the budget, yet it is in many ways the least developed. As yet there are very limited training options available for prospective shelter workers. The unique combinations of skills required for effective shelter managers (including humanitarian training, sociology, anthropology, construction theory and project management skills) is left to occur by chance. It is often a case of aware or concerned individuals from the construction sector jumping sideways into humanitarian work, with limited sociological or humanitarian skills, or, perhaps more commonly, humanitarian or development generalists suddenly finding themselves out of their depth managing a complex construction project. The likelihood of such individuals also having local language and cultural skills is very limited.

Recommendation

More targeted training for ‘shelter as a sector’, as is currently available for other sectors (for example, public health, water and sanitation). This could be done via the
tertiary education sector in IHRS countries to develop undergraduate, postgraduate and top-up training for a ‘next generation’ of shelter experts. Such training would need to recognise that formal engineering and architectural knowledge is of limited use on site and can even be an obstacle to appreciation of the value of local construction systems. Instead, training needs to focus on practical construction knowledge—project management skills combined with the complex socio/cultural skills required to function in the intense cross-cultural working environment of trauma-affected communities. Trainees (particularly those from developed countries) could also benefit from familiarisation with construction systems and materials such as bamboo, pole, thatching and earth construction, which are common in many disaster-prone countries.

7. Transition between phases
The transition from emergency to early recovery phases is somewhat arbitrary but the present system involves complete changes of leadership and coordination, which disrupt programmes in various ways.

Recommendation
Clearer handover from the IFRC to UNDP/UN-HABITAT for transitional and permanent shelter. This should be based on agreed and measurable indicators and include clear processes for handover of information management, relationships with government, staff, liaison officers and structures and systems.

In the case of shelter, it should be a continuous process/cluster with just a change of apparent leader at most. To achieve this, the agencies with shelter lead responsibilities (IOM, IFRC, UNDP, UN-HABITAT, UN High Commissioner for Refugees) should agree from the outset on clear united systems for information gathering and management. The shelter cluster should also have a strategic advisory group that remains constant through the changeover to provide guidance to the cluster leads.27

8. Communication and public outreach
The IHRS is rich in technical and financial resources. It also devotes significant resources to internal information management and communication. But it is less well-equipped for, and consistently fails to do well in, communication with local actors. This has been pointed out repeatedly (for example, Telford et al., 2006) and was obvious once again in Jogjakarta.

Recommendation
Develop simple, cost-effective tools that explain the IHRS, how it works, and what it can (and cannot) do. These need to be appropriate to local conditions in which fluency in English and universal internet access cannot be taken for granted. Such tools might include advertising in public places, pre-written newspaper articles, press releases, radio and TV announcements.
Likewise bilingual documents produced by the translation service recommended above could be made public via websites and hard copy. Summaries of key documents and decisions could be posted in local newspapers.

For local humanitarian actors and agencies, government and community leaders, workshops and a manual explaining how the IHRS works would save a lot of ongoing confusion.

These recommendations are for simple, practical, cost-effective measures which we believe would strengthen the more obvious points of weakness in the system as it worked in Jogjakarta. They do not, however, pretend to address deeper problems inherent in the system itself.

Could the whole system change?

Despite consensus that the system is working better, much of this judgement is made in terms of the internal logic of the IHRS itself—better coordination, faster delivery times and so on—rather than in terms defined by the people it is supposedly serving. We recognise the importance of improving the internal workings of the system and indeed our recommendations above refer directly to this. However, we also believe there are larger and more fundamental issues that the system has not yet recognised, let alone addressed.

There is a long history, in the whole aid and development industry, of preoccupation with issues of internal logic and process, to the detriment of direct engagement with the realities of the people being ‘aided’ or ‘developed’ (Chambers 1997; Ferguson, 1990; Lewis and Mosse, 2006). The IHRS works in a similar way and suffers from a similar problem. We believe the IHRS and the people it serves could benefit by learning from this history.28

The evidence presented above indicates that even the self-evaluations of the system recognise external communication and coordination to have been the weakest points of even a relatively successful operation. Likewise, the local people who worked closely with the IHRS in Jogjakarta all, regardless of their position in the critical spectrum, cited communication across the international–local boundary as a main concern. The implied solutions include a better system of coordination and real-time translation at meetings. However, is it possible that this is a symptom of a deeper problem?

If we take this gap in communication a step further, the local people who are the supposed subjects of the work of the IHRS tend to have less to say on the matter, for the reason that they knew little if anything about the IHRS. They are by no means ungrateful for whatever assistance they receive, but the system is just as obscure to them as they are anonymous to it. This may seem a matter of little relevance to a system where such contact is not seen as necessary. However, our experience suggests otherwise.

One of the most strikingly effective reconstruction projects in Jogjakarta, in terms of time and money but also community participation, was one outside the IHRS
altogether, based firmly on local resources, community solidarity, minimal bureaucracy and face-to-face relationships of trust between its leaders, facilitators and participants (MacRae, 2008). Other successful local projects known to us (including ones organised by Hodgkin himself) worked on similar lines, made possible only by local knowledge and contacts. Similarly, one of the local activists cited above referred to the most successful projects as being those run by INGOs of the smallest size, with the smallest budgets, who had no choice but to work closely with local partners.

This example raises the issue of what has been referred to as the ‘aid chain’ (Wallace et al., 2006) through which the ultimate accountability of agencies is to their donors rather than their own principles, let alone the people they serve. These donors have their own hierarchies of policy and budgetary priorities, which are often tied to political and public relations concerns, and thus have no automatic fit with the needs of the recipients at the bottom end of the chain. Discussion of this is beyond the scope of this paper but it is important to recognise that it is a reality that lies behind any criticisms we may have of agencies and their behaviours.

Observations of this kind are not new—they resonate with a chorus of critiques going back to the beginnings of the development era. What all this seems to be suggesting (yet again) is a need for better understanding of local context and better communication with local people. Yet, if we consider the structure of the whole system, these are the very qualities its structure virtually prevents it from having. It is an array of universal techno-management expertise, dispersed globally, deployed and organised short- or medium-term anywhere and everywhere, in terms of its own logic, in English. Understanding of local context and communication with local people are the very things such a system is least equipped to achieve, yet their importance is blindingly obvious to anyone on the ground. This seems implicit in self-critiques even within the system, yet it is not recognised explicitly, let alone acted upon.

Furthermore, at the level of human resources, it is recognised that there is something of a crisis in the system, especially in terms of skills, experience and retention of staff. However, the skills and experience sought by agencies are almost universally generic technical, managerial and institutional ones. Even in an authoritative survey of this problem, by a senior INGO manager, the only mention of anything resembling local knowledge is a passing reference to local ‘labour markets’, ‘programme environment’ and ‘relationships’ (Richardson, 2006, pp. 337–338). The cultural, political and especially linguistic knowledges that would seem to be fundamental to local context and communication are not even mentioned. This disjunction between obvious needs and non-solutions suggests a systemic myopia that results from the assumed naturalness of the system’s form as it functions today.

In a study of another development context (in Nepal), local officials expressed the view that ‘. . . the personal qualities (of development workers) . . . facilitating greater partnership are fluency in Nepali, a good understanding of Nepali society, time to spend with people and openness and willingness to learn’ (Eyben, 2000, p. 11). These are cited as ‘personal qualities’, but they may perhaps more usefully be embedded (or
not) in organisational structures, perhaps even in the aid and development system as a whole. The author, herself a DfID official, goes on to ask, ‘How will our organisation change, and what will we lose, as well as gain, if we respond to this . . . agenda?’ (Eyben, 2000, p. 12).

This, it seems to us, is much the same question we would ask of the IHRS: what would be gained and lost if the present system of global techno/management expertise were changed to, or even supplemented with, a global network of locally based people with sufficient knowledge of both local context and international systems to act as intermediaries between the two?29

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank many colleagues and aid workers in Indonesia and beyond who shared their thoughts with us, but who remain anonymous because their views may not reflect those of their (present or future) employers. We are aware also that not all will agree with our views, for which we alone are responsible. As this went to final copy-edit, we heard of the premature passing of Retno Winahyu Satyarini, a highly respected and much loved member of the Jogjakarta humanitarian community and a key local player in the response described here. We would like to dedicate this paper to her memory.

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Endnotes

1 The growing literature on complex emergencies is broader in scope, but our concern here is with supposedly less complex ‘natural’ disasters.

2 The absence of standard terminology reflects the new and rapidly evolving nature of the humanitarian system. Work is, however, currently underway to establish global guidelines (see www.humanitarianreform.org).


4 The failures of reconstruction in Aceh are well known and have been widely documented at all levels from the media to official reports. For typical reports from close to the ground early in the process see Kenny (2007) and Pandya (2006). For a high-level official report on the whole process see Telford et al. (2006).

5 The actual amounts were IDR 10 million or IDR 15 million. The system for defining and registering household losses was far from perfect and in fact many households missed out altogether.

6 Figures vary slightly between reports. These are from Manfield (2007a, p. 10).

7 The handover was in reality more complex than this, involving several agencies with cross-cutting cluster responsibilities.
Some structures of this type were constructed in Jogjakarta very early in the process. They were notable for speed and efficiency of construction, but also for dissatisfaction among their recipients as to their size and tendency to overheat.

The average T-Shelter in Jogjakarta cost USD 200–250 and was constructed within one year. The average Aceh T-Shelter took around two years to build and cost around USD 5,000. Overall the comparative funding levels were approximately USD 6 billion donated to Aceh and around USD 200 million external donations to Jogjakarta. In the end the largest component of the Jogjakarta reconstruction came from the government, mostly in the form of some USD 600 million worth of reconstruction grants to affected households.

This observation is based firstly on the experience of senior workers (including Hodgkin) and is common knowledge, but it is also supported by media reports (for example, *Jakarta Post*, 2010, and Lingga, 2010).

Leadership in this context includes not only the elected leaders but often also ‘natural’ or charismatic leaders such as *imam* (Islamic teachers) or relatively successful business people.

The reasons enumerated here overlap to a large extent with those cited in official reports produced from within the system by the JRF (2007, p. 23) and Manfield (2007a), but emphasis and detail are different.


This problem may become worse before it gets better, given the growing labour and skills shortage in the sector and current recruitment policies in which local knowledge plays little or no part (Richardson, 2006).

Especially notable by its absence was the World Bank team administering the JRF, although its implementing agencies did participate sporadically. As a result, funding policies, especially of the JRF, were less attuned to real needs on the ground than they might have been otherwise. The role of the World Bank throughout the process was problematic in various ways, which raises doubts about the inherent compatibility of the Bank’s approach and procedures with the needs of humanitarian responses.

Most of these people and their views were known to Hodgkin through working with them during the response. MacRae interviewed a range of them in July and August 2007. Although they, and indeed their views, are mostly well known to people involved in the response and NGO scene in Jogjakarta, they remain anonymous here because their views may be contentious in some circles.

This policy was in fact changed, but only as a direct result of one of the agencies involved hiring a very competent local person (albeit in a demeaningly low position) who quickly identified and fixed the problem that her younger and less experienced foreign managers were apparently unaware of.

Oxfam was a clear exception here—international in name, but long established in Jogjakarta, run by locals and with well-developed local networks.

It might be argued that there is a need for NGO personnel to acquire English language skills to communicate better with the international system, but this begs the question of disparities of resources and deeper issues of local knowledge that go beyond language.

The shelter cluster in fact moved its meetings from hotels to the relatively neutral space of the engineering faculty of a university, which proved to be a successful alternative.

Hodgkin’s memory of such meetings is that both NGOs and government were invited and that the former generally attended while the latter did not, perhaps because meetings were often conducted outside normal office hours.
Hodgkin comments that this was more so in the early stages than the later ones, which reflected the inevitable tension between the need for speedy action and the ideals of participation. In fairness it should be noted that local communities did not feel any better informed about the plans and activities of the government and LNGOs.

Further sources of such general impressions are the (electronic) records of a LNGO forum, Suara, and a book compiled by another such forum (Widyanta, 2007).

For example, in Jogjakarta, while the cluster system built some 75,000 T-shelters, the remaining 200,000 plus families built their own shelters with assistance from church groups, LNGOs, local businesses, family and friends.

The reasons for this lack are complex and require further discussion, which is beyond the scope of this paper.

In Jogjakarta a shelter cluster effectively continued under the auspices of a working group within the early recovery cluster. This was clearly effective, and could be enshrined into UNDP cluster management procedures. This would ensure that the shelter sector is not neglected by an over-worked ‘early recovery coordinator’.

For a recent example of the preoccupation with coordination see Stephenson (2005). For a rare voice from within the system that recognises this as a problem see Saunders (2004, pp. 168–170).

Moves to enshrine the cluster system in the Indonesian national disaster response system appear to be moving in this direction. How they will actually perform in the next major disaster remains to be seen.

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