A REVIEW OF NGO COORDINATION IN ACEH
POST EARTHQUAKE/TSUNAMI

Study sponsored by the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA)

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BACKGROUND: An Earthquake measuring 9.2 on the Richter scale was recorded in the Indian Ocean on December 26, 2004 just miles west of Banda Aceh, a province on the Indonesian island of Sumatra. The earthquake caused considerable damage and created a Tsunami that swept to the shores of Aceh, Sri Lanka, India, Thailand and even Somalia. In Aceh the death toll (buried bodies) is currently at 126,000. Ninety thousand (90,000) persons remain missing and are presumed dead. Approximately 407,000 persons are registered as IDPs as a result of the disaster. Since martial law was established in May of 2003 approximately 40,000 troops have been deployed in Aceh. During the period of May 2003 until the tsunami an estimated 2,800 people have been killed and 125,000 people displaced related to a conflict between the military and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM). Schools, health centers and considerable private and public property has also been destroyed.

The Aceh Province of Sumatra was the hardest hit by the disaster of Dec. 26. A second quake measuring 8.7 on the Richter scale on March 31 took another approximately 1,300 lives on the island of Nias, just off the western coast of Aceh. The disaster has left 406,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) located in spontaneous settlement camps, host communities, semi-permanent government barracks, areas affected by the disaster but where already some families are rebuilding, and areas where people are still living in their homes, but whose houses have been damaged and who may have to relocate.

The International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) was contacted and asked to 1) obtain an understanding of the needs and expectations of the NGO community with regards to NGO coordination and collaboration, 2) assess current mechanisms for NGO collaboration and coordination, 3) query NGOs concerning on-going policy issues, 4) identify options for housing an accountability mechanism (as follow up to a previous mission), and 5) provide recommendations for NGO and ICVA involvement in further NGO coordination. A consultant was hired and spent 2 days in Geneva and 12 days (March 22 – April 2) in Aceh. This report is based on individual interviews with 24 staff from 18 International NGOs in Aceh, OCHA, Red Cross Banda Aceh, ICRC, IOM, UNHCR, and the leadership of four local NGO consortiums in Aceh with a combined membership of 150 NGOs.

CONTEXT: The issues of coordination need to be put into the context of the complexity of the disaster, ensuing response, and the political/security environment pre-existing in Aceh. The following are important considerations that have shaped the issues of coordination:

- The tsunami was a huge media event with many tourists in Thailand and Sri Lanka providing video footage of the event,
- The effects as seen on television evoked an unprecedented outpouring of concern, action, and financial assistance,
- An estimated 300 international NGOs responded to the disaster; an estimated 2,000 foreigners and thousands of Indonesians arrived to help in Aceh,
Governments have pledged a total of 5.8 billion for recovery efforts, while impossible to date to know, estimates of private contributions given to NGOs range from 5-7 billion dollars,
A number of NGOs eventually informed donors that they had received adequate donations,
Only a handful of NGOs had any presence in Aceh before the tsunami and that presence consisted of small offices; the estimated NGO expenditures of those handful of NGOs was $2 million in 2002,
Aceh was (is) in the throes of an insurgent (GAM) –military (TNI) conflict, Aceh is in a state of civil emergency, only a handful of international staff of either UN agencies or NGOs were working in Aceh at the time of the disaster,
Local NGO capacity in Aceh (as well as police, health, education, ministry of welfare, etc. institutions) has been diminished in the short term due to loss of staff, traumatized staff, and loss of material possessions and equipment,
Organizations were able to assign staff or recruit new staff for very short periods initially (weeks) due to the need to also respond in Sri Lanka and India, staff turnover has been very high in NGO and UN organizations from the start,
The vast majority of foreign staff do not speak the locally used languages,
The humanitarian actors are operating in what international businessmen consistently vote the most corrupt country on the planet,
The emergency phase ended quickly.

COORDINATION EFFORTS TO DATE: OCHA, in carrying out its mandate, has taken the lead in overall coordination of the humanitarian community. In Banda Aceh, they have developed a Humanitarian Information Center (HIC) at which NGOs registered and also where NGOs, UN agencies, and others could indicate where they were intervening or planning to intervene. This has resulted in the production of maps which indicate who is working in what areas (sectors when possible) and a list of NGO contact information. OCHA also conducted bi-weekly humanitarian meetings which recently became weekly. Minutes of these meetings are circulated. Further, sectoral meetings have been set up and meet usually once per week. Regular Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) meetings have been taking place which have included NGO representations. “Heads of UN agencies” meetings are also being conducted on a regular basis. Finally, an informal meeting among a few NGOs has been taking place once a week in Banda Aceh.

In both Banda Aceh and Jakarta the government met regularly with the humanitarian community (OCHA, UN, NGOs, foreign government representatives) and among themselves from the outset of the disaster. These meetings continue. Recently, a “blueprint” for rehabilitation and recovery has been published by the government which outlines the priorities and time frames for recovery and rehabilitation. Further, they are expected to announce, in the near future, the names of important persons who will constitute a special committee to oversee the recovery and rehabilitation program as outlined in the “blueprint.”

This report does not focus on an analysis of either OCHA’s or the government performance in coordination. Suffice it to say that the unprecedented number of actors in
the context mentioned above has made coordination exceedingly challenging. Overall efforts have resulted largely in exchange of information and generally have not arrived at a rationale assessment of needs, capacities of organizations, and a subsequent agreed upon division of labor. The government is in the process of developing criteria which will provide them the basis to determine which NGOs will stay and which will be invited to leave the province. Requests for information from OCHA to NGOs have not produced the results desired in order to deepen analysis of the situation. The mid term review recently published by OCHA does not adequately portray the amount of money NGOs have dedicated to the tsunami crisis nor in what sectors do they propose to conduct their activities. It has been difficult for NGOs to determine where and in what sectors they will definitively intervene while the blueprint was under development. The UN Under Secretary - General for Humanitarian Affairs has made a plea to NGOs for greater disclosure and transparency in regards to funding received and expenditure plans for the tsunami response.

Note that the humanitarian response to the recent earthquake resulted in further damage and loss of life (primarily on Nias Island) but did produce a better coordination of response on the part of the international community. This reflects the overall understanding of the need to coordinate and increased capacities on the ground among the UN, Government of Indonesia, and NGOs.

**EFFECTS OF THE CONTEXT:** The above mentioned context has produced effects which have had an impact on NGO performance and coordination. The unprecedented amount of money donated to NGOs has reportedly resulted in less than usual need/desire to coordinate. In many emergency programs one has a number of NGOs competing for scarce UN/AID donor community resources. In this case it appears this phenomenon of competition which also results, as a matter of course, in increased information sharing, is lacking to the degree we have seen in other complex emergencies. The rush to find activities and beneficiaries in the short term has also resulted in a phenomenon of “claim staking”, using one NGO workers analogy of an “old west gold rush”. This staking has been based on rapid assessments and done at times in the context of plans being developed by the government but not uniformly in consultation with affected communities. The following effects have been noted through the interview process:

- NGOs, due to lack of presence previously, had to spend considerable time setting up offices, hiring staff, importing vehicles, etc..
- Multiple assessments have been done in the same areas with the same populations (to the chagrin of needy victims); assessments not published,
- Duplication of efforts and therefore precious energy squandered,
- Plans rapidly developed with a shortage of community inputs,
- NGOs, due to amounts of financing available, have developed ambitious agendas that have not yet fully taken the political and security situation into account,
- Local NGOs feel they were swept aside in the first months of the response,
- No proper discussion of the end game, what is the desired outcome of the collective recovery program?
- There is to date no place where NGOs can discuss policy, accountability, or where media and others can reach the NGOs collectively,
- Local NGOs are frustrated, while they greatly appreciate the NGO response and presence they do not feel sufficiently consulted, exclusive use of English at coordination and sectoral meetings problematic for local NGOs,
- Local NGOs concerned that INGOs lining up behind government plans, which have not gone through a community vetting process, could undermine aspirations of Acehnese for greater autonomy and freedom,
- In one administrative area of 24 villages and 5,000 people, 42 NGOs have registered with the local government to participate in recovery and rehabilitation,
- Environmental concerns may not sufficiently getting attention (sourcing wood, waste management, over-fishing),
- Security issues within and among NGOs have not been sufficiently assessed,
- The NGOs are not bringing consistent consensus on important issues being discussed at IASC meetings,
- The NGOs may have emergency staff deployed at a time now when people experienced in rehabilitation are needed,
- Unclear whether NGOs should (as policy) employ contractors directly or have families themselves decide who will build their houses.

There have been, however, some positive signs. Clearly there is bilateral cooperation taking place often based on personal contacts between agency heads. Informal meetings are producing common agenda issues and did lead to the request for analysis of the NGO coordination. Sectoral meetings are providing forums for discussion of policy and accountability issues if they are not yet producing a coordinated approach. One NGO is producing minutes of humanitarian meetings and sectoral meetings into Behasa. In at least one area of NGO activity approximately 15 agencies, including a couple of local agencies, are meeting once a week, sharing both assessments and safety related information, and coordinating meetings with the local government. In another area, local NGO Forum Walhi (environment), after seeing the 8-10 international NGOs in the area display a lack of coordination, took the lead to facilitate a coordination process between INGOs and local communities. A protection working group has been formed and has met a number of times. Sphere training has been offered to the community by one NGO. Security/safety needs are being assessed by an NGO with a view toward a series of workshops. OCHA was planning to provide a workshop on Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) which would promote 1) the establishment of regular baseline data collection on IDP locations and migration patterns, 2) an information campaign to inform IDPs of assistance options, and 3) assistance gaps and ways to assess needs/preferences of IDP populations.
WHAT NGOS WOULD LIKE TO SEE THEMSELVES DO BETTER:

- Rationalize meetings and better manage information exchange,
- Discuss issue of how the government is/will decide which NGOs will continue to work and which may be asked to leave,
- Monitor sector group work, eliminate duplication, tease out cross sectoral issues for discussions, provide appropriate information to concerned NGOs,
- Collate best practices in accountability (ex...sphere standards), promulgate and educate the various standards and codes of conduct among NGOs, dialogue with government on standards,
- Discussions on rights based issue (IDP principles for example) related to rehabilitation and recovery,
- Manage an ascending security agenda,
- Communicate with and maintain relationships with local NGOs,
- Identify and discuss cross cutting issues,
- Consider joint staff training; hundreds of new staff hired could benefit from various levels of training,
- Develop a library of assessments, evaluations, reports and other information,
- Develop and promulgate messages to the working environment (UN, local NGOs, GOI, media) at appropriate times,
- Work more closely and efficiently with OCHA, IASC, and UN agencies to develop common attitudes, policy positions, strategic directions,
- Liaise more efficiently with the government,
- Develop common policy and advocacy agendas,
- Improve communications with heads of office in Jakarta on issues in order to enhance advocacy with central government and other Jakarta based entities,
- Provide a means to analyze human resource policies,
- Monitor extent to which local communities are participating in NGO programs,
- Consider development of common logistics and procurement teams, efficiencies can be gained through joint purchasing, warehousing, transportation, and maintenance of vehicles.

Upon analysis of the comments of NGOs, there are five broad areas where NGOs believe they can come together more efficiently and effectively through a coordinating mechanism. These are:

1) rationalization of communications, management of information leading to better division of labor,
2) policy or advocacy/attitude development and communication of policy/attitude on issues as appropriate,
3) security and safety,
4) accountability, standards, transparency,
5) logistics, procurement, human resources training,
6) dialogue, partnerships, and co-advocacy with local NGOs.
The local NGO leadership looked at NGO coordination from some different perspectives. Firstly, like all Acehnese, they were grateful for the global response, generosity, and the specific response of the many volunteers from around the world and from Indonesia. They were also grateful for the International NGO and UN actions. They support the presence of foreign humanitarian organizations in Aceh. They hope that these entities will provide them greater space to do their own work as part of civil society. They do feel that they have been sidelined due to the utilization of English exclusively at meetings. However, their greatest concern is that the International NGOs will, in order to stay present and active, not exercise strategies for protection in their responses to the tsunami disaster. They fear they will line up behind a distrusted government and military and will not sufficiently assure that communities have access to adequate information and participate in the decision making process regarding resettlement options and plans. They expressed concern that the rights of the tsunami affected population would not be protected under relevant international law, particularly the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and that the International NGOs would break their vows not to be “silent witnesses” to human rights violations.

The NGOs welcomed an increased dialogue with the International NGOs on these issues and hoped that steps would soon be taken in that direction. Note that one International NGO had recently attempted to hold a workshop on the “Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement” but was told by local authorities that they could not hold it as planned. The NGO decided to postpone the workshop.

A PROPOSED MODEL OF NGO COORDINATION: Throughout the interview process there was consensus of the NGO need for collaboration in key areas and the creation of an entity to foster and facilitate this process. The following model was developed after extensive conversations and was presented to a number of NGO heads personally (including local NGO consortium leadership) and also to the gathering of NGOs (estimated 80) at the weekly OCHA humanitarian briefing. It has been presented to NGO directors in Jakarta and to OCHA representatives. The only reluctance expressed by a couple of NGOs was that they do not want an entity that creates more meetings and more work that is not useful. As the model would be managed by the NGOs themselves it will be up to them to assure that this is not the case.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE MODEL:

1) There are local NGO consortiums existing around the issues of human rights, environment, gender, community mobilization/monitoring, and community based organizations. They are formal entities with membership and are considering the development of a larger Acehnese consortium representing civil society.

2) There were a handful of INGOs with small offices in Aceh before the earthquake and tsunami. The vast majority of NGOs present today are there specifically to work on Rehabilitation and Recovery. By nature of the overall goal, and the time frame of the recovery and rehabilitation as recently set out in the government
blueprint, the model is specifically tied to rehabilitation and recovery and by its nature temporary.

3) There is a perceived need to develop this quickly.

4) INGOs have the capacity to provide necessary core funding and can also seek contributions.

DESCRIPTION OF A PROPOSED MODEL OF NGO COORDINATION IN ACEH:

A platform or association of NGOs working on Recovery and Rehabilitation in ACEH will be dedicated to assisting member NGOs working in Aceh to:

1) encourage NGO specific accountability and efficiency through exchange of information concerning activities and provide information services to assist decision making,

2) provide a space for debate and for reconciliation of different views and approaches as well as create a neutral and independent forum for the discussion and elaboration of policy and advocacy issues,

3) encourage dialogue and exchange with civil society with an emphasis on existing groups or forums of NGOs in Aceh.

The platform/association recognizes that OCHA is the overall humanitarian community designated agency for coordination of activity in Aceh. They have legitimacy, access to government, resources, and experience. OCHA becomes, de facto, an important partner in the accomplishment of the above mentioned objectives. Other important partners in the environment include the IASC, UN heads of agencies, government entities at all levels including that entity which will coordinate the implementation of the blueprint, communities of IDPs, host communities, local NGOs, particularly their representative bodies. As the platform/association more effectively adopts common positions there will be a need to communicate those to others, including to OCHA and, likely more often, with the assistance of OCHA.

Expected results of an active and well managed platform/association:

- increased exchange of meaningful information producing on time situation analysis that shows where money is going, into which geographical areas and sectors, and to which target populations,
- minimization or elimination of duplication of activities and the fostering of opportunities for partnerships and joint interventions,
- specific agency expertise harnessed by the community for the overall improvement of performance of the NGO community,
- guidelines, procedures, collection of data methodologies, measures of success facilitated and common understandings developed,
- common voice developed on pertinent issues and communicated to wider audiences,
- learning (concerning relief and rehabilitation response, coordination, etc..) in general of the community of NGOs increased.
Any NGO is welcomed to join the platform/association. Initial dues are voluntary. The platform/association creates a Provisional Steering Committee of nine persons which represents the wishes of the Association vis-à-vis a Secretariat and manages the work of the Secretariat. The Secretariat consists of two professionals. The Coordinator of the Secretariat should be someone with experience in:

- gathering and effectively managing information in complex emergency and rehabilitation programs,
- developing policies and positions among diverse NGO actors,
- challenges of recovery and rehabilitation programs,
- communicating messages to identified constituencies,
- developing relevant information for decision making,
- security and safety considerations in complex emergencies,
- administration and financial matters,
- ability to communicate in English and Behasa preferred.

The second professional will have a more specific focus on accountability and work at the behest of the coordinator. This person will have experience in:

- the existence and implementation of various codes of conduct including the Sphere standards,
- the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and other relevant international law,
- training and facilitation through group processes and the implementation of workshops and seminars,
- developing practical methods of monitoring indicators and mechanisms,
- experience in facilitating groups of professionals (in this case volunteer NGO staff members) focusing on quality, accountability, and monitoring,
- ability to communicate in English and Behasa preferred.

With support staff of a secretary, driver, and office supplies, translations, etc… the estimated cost of a Secretariat is approximately $250,000 annually. This cost during the first two years can assumedly be largely born by the NGOs. Initially one could envisage 20 NGOs putting up 10,000 dollars to start the platform/association, seeking grants from donors, and then having other joiners make voluntary contributions. This avoids the always difficult issue of membership dues in the initial phase of the organization.

PROCESS: The process for getting an organization as outlined above off the ground will require, among others, the following steps:

1) Approval by ICVA Executive Committee for the Secretariat to become involved.
2) The circulation of a narrative and budget which outlines the platform/association.
3) The drawing up of terms of reference for two professional staff members.
4) ICVA Secretariat seeks commitments by NGOs and donors to fund and participate in the provisional steering committee. ICVA and provisional committee seek candidates for the identified positions.

5) Provisional Committee set up in Banda Aceh conducts the necessary arrangements including alerting government of their creation of a coordinating mechanism.
PERSONS INTERVIEWED:

Kirsten Gelsdorf-OCHA Banda Aceh
Rina Meutia –HIC, Aceh
Pat Johns – Catholic Relief Services
Francisco Roque Castro – Oxfam
Stephen Gwynne Vaughn/Alex Carle – CARE
Paul Crowe- Concern Worldwide
Michele Lipner-OCHA Banda Aceh
Carol Jacobsen-Child Fund
Faisal Hadi/Jehalim Bangun – Koalsi NGO HAM
Ann Claxton - World Vision
Lorena Berne – Planète Urgence
Dr. Jean Bernard Bouvier– Medecins du Monde
Brigit Zeitier – German Agro Action
Ejodia K – Church World Service
Jennifer Donohue – Project Concern International
Marites De La Cruz – IOM
Erlita, Purnama, Devi – KKTGA Forum (gender focused)
Seifeldin Nimer – Islamic Relief
Peter Stevenson – Mercy Corps
Nichola Krey –AustCare
Vincentius Haryando/Mr. Engall – JRS
Mr. Hikal and Ms. Lyndal – NGO Forum Aceh LSM
Leo Macillivary – ICMC
Bustari Mansyur – PMI (Red Cross) Banda Aceh
Ed Schenkenberg van Mierop– ICVA
Manisha Thomas – ICVA
Florence Sechaud – ICRC Geneva
Tom Alcedo – Save the Children - Jakarta
Charles Davy – ICMC/Jakarta
Jonathan Evans – CRS/Jakarta
Indonesian Forum for Environment (WALHI) – Aceh (www.walhi.org)
Enayet Madani – OCHA
Zia Choudhury – Humanitarian Accountability Partnership- International
Jon Erik Nygaard – Cardi/Norwegian Refugee Council
Christina Bennike – Cardi/Norwegian Refugee Council
Andrew Harper – UNHCR
Hannah Entwistle – OCHA Geneva
Jean McCluskey – Sphere Project