Rethinking the Culture of Leadership in Aceh after the Tsunami

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the leadership during the tsunami in Aceh. Reports revealed that there were extensive dissatisfactions upon the leaders and their leadership from the tsunami. The paper aims to highlight the issues of leadership failure during the tsunami and also capture the challenges of leaders during the reconstruction and rehabilitation programs after the disaster. Seven key informants were identified for the study. Additionally, a total of 103 respondents took part in the interviews and 450 participated in the survey. However, this paper focuses on the results from the interviews amongst the seven key informants of the phenomenon. The results showed that there was lack of effective leaders, lack of involvement of leaders during disaster. It was also found that leaders are required to playing a more critical role even before the disaster. The study implies that Aceh requires the broadening the context of leadership to include transformative ends and means to secure greater measure of justice for its community.

Keywords: Aceh, leaders, leadership, tsunami, challenges

INTRODUCTION

The Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 was one of the deadliest disasters in modern history. It caused unprecedented death, destruction, and suffering for the people. More than 170,000 people lost their lives. Great swatches of coastlines were submerged and mauled by the earthquake. Half a million people were left homeless; 600 villages were destroyed (Vatikiotis, 2007).

Months after the tsunami, The Indonesian government formulated a plan for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Aceh, which established the Badan Rehabilitasi dan Rekonstruksi (Agency for the Rehabilitation and Reconstruction or BRR) The BRR was designed as the government agency that would manage the disaster recovery program, which included coordinating $7 billion in pledge aid from the Indonesia government, international donors, and local, national and international NGOs (US AID, 2008). The BRR was tasked with over sight of the largest natural disaster recovery program in modern times. Its mandate called for the agency to:
1. Coordinate reconstruction projects to ensure the efficient allocation of resources and to minimize gaps and duplication.
2. Ensure that pledges were realized and that funds were sufficient to meet the needs of the people of Aceh and Nias.
3. Empower and strengthen local government through its engagement with reconstruction.
4. Restore livelihoods.
5. Strengthen communities.
The joint effort so far in reconstructing Aceh and Nias has been enormous undertaking. The initial relief efforts of 2005 were followed by extensive reconstruction works that continue till date, and that have had to overcome significant obstacles both related to the sheer extent of the damage and also to the scale and speed of response (BRR & Partners, 2006). One of the major issues that faced the reconstruction to building a better Aceh is the leaders and their roles in the reconstruction and rehabilitation programs after the tsunami (Iwan, 2006).

While much has been researched about the disaster, its impact and its environmental issues, but little attention had been given to leaders and their leadership. In addition, little attention is paid on the learning experience on the vulnerable entity such as the person, people and community (East West Center Report, 2005). Notable here is the leadership problems ranged from lack of competent leaders, lack of involvement of the leaders, and the insignificant roles by the leaders during the disaster. Besides that, for decades, the people of Aceh endured the effects of an on-going guerrilla war between GAM (Free Aceh Movement) and Indonesia’s military. Throughout the years of war, the population has suffered human rights violations committed by both sides. Thus, many Acehnese did find the failure of leadership has added to their damaged and loss. It is timely to investigate and review what has gone wrong with leaders and recognize the efforts to revitalize the culture of leadership in the recovery and reconstruction stages after the tsunami.

The phenomenon of leadership in this complex situation is difficult. However, it is the authors’ belief that there is consistent affirmation that if leaders had played significant roles during the disaster, more lives would have been saved. Competent leaders and effective leadership is of utmost importance to disaster management. There is no question that leaders who can cultivate and employ some elements of integrated intelligence would secure a greater measure of justice for all people in a country or outside the nation (Liu et al, 2011). This reaffirmed the belief that to serve effectively, the leader must understand his or her limits, share power seek others’ knowledge and insights and involve others meaningfully in decision making (Liu et al, 2011). Reports and studies show that disasters like tsunami inflict terrible trauma, and their physical devastation is often accompanied by comparable political upheavals within leaders and government (Marcello, 2011). Perhaps, post-tsunami upheavals created an opportunity for reinventing to a more effective and just leadership in the context of Aceh.

Hence, the aim of the study is to report the problems and challenges of leaders and their leadership during and after the tsunami in Aceh. The findings demonstrated that leadership of Aceh faced tremendous pitfalls as leaders were not competent and lack of their involvement during the emergency and relief period at the time of the disaster. Obviously, the violation of human rights is seen, discrimination, and poor aids distribution were the common complaints. The results of the study added knowledge to the notion of leadership and most importantly the insights gained serve as practical implication for leadership through natural disasters.

**Leadership in Aceh**

Historically, Aceh had been in conflict for the past years with the Indonesia’s military. The 30-year separatist conflict may have adversely affected the capacity of local government. The conflict had thwarted economic and social progress and stymied the development and delivery of government services (Masyrafah & McKeon, 2008). Aceh’s great challenge is to overcome the enormous physical and psychic problems created by the tsunami in ways that serve its entire people in the long run. To succeed, Aceh indeed urgently required leaders who emulate consistently the qualities of visionary and possess the habits of heart and action that elevated the whole nation to a more just path.
In 2005, the signing of Peace Agreement ended the 30-year conflict and led to the first democratically held direct elections in Aceh. These resulted in a large number of newly elected district heads and city heads, many with only very limited experience in development. Nonetheless, the leadership enabled the local government in collaborating with the international agencies in the reconstruction programs (Masyrafah & McKeon, 2008).

Given this context of newly elected district leaders, serving in many newly formed local administrations, it is unsurprising that local government have had competing priorities and were not as involved in the reconstruction effort as they other-wise could have been (Masyrafah & McKeon, 2008). In short, leaders and their leadership should focus to rebuilding the country, to gain its trust of its people, working to ensure the peace holds and initiating a process to management the recovery, reconstruction and rehabilitation programs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on leadership has shown some shifting towards focusing on the daily practice of leadership including its moral, emotional, and relational aspects, rather than its rational, objective, and technical ones (Carroll et al., 2008). The focus of looking at leadership is more in its activity rather than through the traits and heroics of individual actors under the longstanding ‘great man’ theory (Cherry, 2012).

Since leadership has become an increasingly central component in many organizational settings, Ford (2010) suggests a more critical and reflexive approach to the study of leadership, in which attention should be given to situations, events institutions, ideas, social practices and processes. The development of more critical approaches needs to adopt a more culturally sensitive and locally based interpretive approach, which takes accounts of an individual’s experiences, identities and the power relations. In addition, the studying of leadership should move from being static to being action oriented, leadership gradually started being viewed as a process; thus putting the focus on the interaction between the many factors that occur within an organization.

Notable here is the notion of leaders and leadership had remained “silent” as work should not have revealed the mistakes made by the people in the authority level. The experience and observation provided by the participants had gained attention at all levels in the community of Aceh since after the tsunami. It is noted that effective leaders make the necessary connections between their leadership and management specifically during a natural disaster (Karan & Subbiah, 2011).

Effective leaders and leadership

Joseph et al (2011) asserted that Mandela’s are the qualities that Robert Greenleaf sees in “service” leaders”, those of whom call effective leaders. Being an effective leader has traditionally been understood by citizens as something that only heroes can master, usually by hoarding influence and power within hierarchic organizations. The projection of state power beyond national boarders has been viewed as the domain of the “warrior caste”. The scholars furthered convinced that Mandela cultivated and employed the four elements of integrated intelligence that characterize leadership as a way of being: emotional, moral, social and spiritual intelligence. Mastering and employing these capacities defines the true discipline of any leader who wishes to be effective over time. Under this mind set, Joseph and his colleagues built the Louisiana Effective Leadership Program (LaELP) after the Katrina experience at Louisiana (Jospeh et al, 2011). In addition, in a study on team-based performance, it was revealed that in the team project, leaders are crucial as to minimize the mistakes in the process of accomplishing a project (Li et al, 2012),
Looking on the reconstructions and rehabilitation progress, Aceh’s is undergoing a phenomenal amount of change driven by various factors (e.g. Government, economy, international market, technology and others). To succeed, Aceh—indeed, any jurisdiction aiming to increase the effectiveness and scope of its service to constituents—urgently requires leadership transformation. The reputation for leadership has not been exemplary, tarnished as it has been from time to time as another politician is indicted, convicted for some failure of duty. Public expectations in Aceh historically have been low and cynical. A singular “failure of leadership” in Aceh phenomenon is that its system has not developed a reliable system for discovering and nurturing leadership capacity in those who occupy positions of authority. Building a large cadre of leaders across the business, government and non profit sectors should be the priority in managing the disaster or the impacts of the disaster. Over time such a cadre will change the nature, understanding and expectations of leadership in the Aceh.

Conceptual Framework

Based on the literature review, a conceptual framework is produced to facilitate in the data collection. The framework is made up of three major components: 1) Competent leaders; 2) Effective leadership; 3) Service leaders. The service leadership is the main source that suggests effective leadership take place in time of a disaster. To succeed, it is believed leaders who emulate consistently the qualities that Robert Greenleaf sees in “service leaders,” those whom we call effective leaders. Finally, assuming that that leadership is significant, the research investigates how leaders and leadership for a more equitable Aceh is indeed apt and timely.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a mixed-method design in soliciting qualitative and quantitative data. It was envisaged that the mixed-method design would provide richer data and in-depth views of the participants’ experiences. This approach consists of procedure in collecting, analyzing and integrating both quantitative and qualitative data during certain stages of the research process with a single study (Creswell, 2009). The first phase consisted of the collection and analysis of qualitative data. The qualitative results were obtained from interviews with seven key informants. All the respondents were asked the same set of semi-structured questions. Each interview lasted about one hour to one and a half hours. This paper highlights the experience of seven key informants identified for the study. These seven key informants consisted of five males and two females.

The key informants were identified as individuals directly responsible for developing or implementing policies or practices that affected post tsunami relief. They included representatives from the Governor’s Office and institutions from different agencies. The seven key informants shared an account of their experience and observations after the tsunami. Most importantly, many issues were revealed upon their reflection after a decade of the disaster. The issue of leaders and their leadership emerged even the questions were not directly asked in all the conversations with the keys informants. Thus, it was decided to investigate into understanding the leaders and leadership at that situation during the tsunami. The results provided insights of leaders and leadership in the context of rebuilding Aceh after a decade of the tsunami.

All the seven key informants were interviewed at the first phase. The face-to- face interviews were carried out with the all the key informants officer from the governor’s office, managers and staff at the Institute of Human Resource Development of Aceh, staff at the higher institution, a school principal, a
community leader and a staff at the NGO. An additional visit was made to Aceh to confirm some of the initial findings. All the seven key informants went through the second interviews. A total of 14 interviews took place during the study. The profiles of the seven key informants are shown in Table 1.

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Educational Background</th>
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<td>Dr Idris</td>
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<td>High School</td>
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<td>Susan</td>
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<td>Degree</td>
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A total of seven key informants took part in the interviews. The key informants are listed according to their names, age, work place and education background in Table 1. There are two females and five males from different organizations. In general, the key informants’ age ranges from 39-62 years old. The key informants were asked to recall many episodes of their leaning experience during and after the disaster. Eventually, the key informants were asked about their experience and observation towards leadership during and after the tsunami. In addition, the actual names of the key informants’ names were not used in this report.

In this context, the data obtained from all the participants were collectively analyzed to uncover common themes and sub-themes on the learning experience of the survivors in Aceh after the tsunami. The data analysis involved three phases. The first phase was the analysis of qualitative data in terms of interviews, observational notes and documents amongst the participants. All taped interviews were transcribed. The qualitative data were content analyzed case by case, using inductive and deductive analysis. Data reduction was then conducted to identify common themes and sub-themes in all thirteen cases. It is the aim of paper to highlight only the issues focused on the leaders and leadership. Additional research needs to be carried out to investigate survivors of to provide additional information about the learning and experience of the survivors of other types of natural disasters. In addition, the actual of the key informants’ names were not used in this report.

**FINDINGS**

In line with the experience, a series of observations and reflective activities took place among the key informants about the issues of leaders in Aceh during the tsunami. It was found that the leaders remain the critical issue as majority of the key informants uttered, “It is a country without leaders”. All they did suggest at this time is to rethinking of the culture of leadership in Aceh. The three themes demonstrate the problem and challenges of leadership in Aceh:

- Lack of competent leaders
- Lack of effective leadership
- Lack of involvement of leaders
- Challenges for leadership
Lack of competent leaders

In the interviews, however, with government officials or local people, there were huge dissatisfactions about the leaders and leadership during the tsunami ad also at the aftermath work. The key informants reveal, if the below sample is indicative of the general sentiments of tsunami survivors regarding the role of the leaders, then the government needs to re identify its accurate leaders and leadership especially in the reconstruction phase of the tsunami disaster. In nearly every village we visited survivors complained, often bitterly. Dr Qis recalled his learning experience; he convinced us that if only the leaders would have played more significant roles, many lives could have been saved. He said the more he thinks about the issues, the more he identified the importance of what he ‘reflected’ and it would eventually lead him to compose himself and begin to act on it:

*I will definitely tell people no other choice...the leaders are so important. But they had not seen such huge disaster...many of them fled away. Every time I reflected and talked about it, I blamed the leaders at all level. Even, at the village the leaders did not know what to do. After the tsunami, those who had some power abused their power. It is not that kind of leaders we want. We need to change. People need to think seriously about leadership now.*

Roziah, the school principal who is a leader herself was saddened by some of the reactions of the people in the authority and she remembered, even things were overwhelmed and chaotic during the critical situation but leaders were found to have acted selfishly and incompetently as she uttered:

*It was country without leader. No authority. We did not have leaders to lead and Aceh was in conflict. Many of the ulamas (religious people) who were important people did not do anything to help! They just save themselves!*

Lack of effective leaders

It was overwhelming to find out that within the community, they argued that effective leaders are essential. For instance, they emphasized that effective leaders are not only important during the disaster; effective leaders should have been identified at the initial stage at the local government. Ramli was disappointed as he witnessed some irresponsible people in the authority whom they abandoned the country when the disaster strikes.

*Surprisingly many who did not lost anything also fled away from Aceh, even the authority who should direct and lead on how to cope with the disaster. They were care less about the people. Too bad.*

Past experience had alerted the community about being equipped with competent and effective leadership as it is considered the best way to prepare for any natural disaster. Pak Kecil who had the experience being the village head shared his observations:

*Should we have experienced, locals can provide assistance sooner and more lives can be saved once they have settled down their own. Those who are victims and living far away from beaches can come to Banda Aceh and provided assistance to the victims. Leaders are very important. They can coordinate many things.*

Lack of involvement of leaders

It is not easy to give a comprehensive evaluation what actually took place in the whole decision making process at the center of Banda Aceh government after the tsunami. Through media reporting and information from the key informants, that there was a leadership deficit in general. Dr Idris who was the former lecturer at the higher institution had strongly foresighted that the roles of leaders at all levels are essential under the circumstances of a disaster.
We have no leader at the top. Many things were done without leaders. No authority (civil, police or military) came to help and provided assistance to the victims. I wanted to command people to unite and help each other. As a religious leader, I should do that but I was too old and weak to do such a thing. Those who survived and had found their own families or relatives, gathered to provide assistance to the victims at nearby their home. However, only few of them and many left Banda Aceh to other cities in Aceh and even outside of Aceh.

The lack of experience and expert in leadership in works during disaster was perhaps the greatest challenge. Although the local people had experienced some degree of the disaster, they had never faced a huge one in the history. All levels of people faced a multitude of challenges on utilizing, mobilizing and coordinating resources during emergency and at relief period. According to the analysis, the responses to Aceh were laudable. It was in the chaotic situations, individuals in the community were panic; there were lots of biases and discrimination, burglary, and social disorder during the relief phase. In addition, the immediate in-charge-person or a leader was also deemed inadequate.

Challenges for leadership

On the first reflection, it is necessarily true that most rural communities have well-defined systems of leadership. Unfortunately, during a disaster, the lack of experience and expert knowledge was perhaps the greatest challenge. It was found out from the study, if only the leaders at the community level would have played more significantly by doing some coordination tasks requested at the time of the disaster, the impact could be lessen especially in terms of distributing aids and assistance to the affected ones. Suhra, revealed during the interviews that the first thing the community should have done was to identify certain people to lead the roles in different tasks to reduce damaged and lives loss. It was obvious, the challenges at that time were lack of effective leaders but significant lessons had been learnt.

We did not have leaders to lead and Aceh was in conflict. The police headquarter, who is responsible in such a situation, collapsed. Its headquarter was located only meters away from the mouth of Aceh River. The 15-meter waves destroyed everything they had. The same thing happened to central facilities of the provincial police in Punge. They had almost nothing to help people. Most of them also lost their own families since most of their barracks are located nearby the beach.

Community leaders should be trained regularly to anticipate a disaster. Many houses and schools are rebuilt along and nearby coastal lines. It should be relocated partially in the near future.

Obviously, local and regional leadership is essential from villages, towns and municipalities up to the prefectural level. Local leaders are the ones who best the feelings and needs of the survivors and can play a critical role in expressing their voice to the outside world.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The findings show the ineffectiveness of leadership during that critical period had caused great implications to the devastating situations. Many believed effective leadership would have reduced the damage or loss of the disaster. It is also believed that leaders are the key persons who could help and coordinated work at all the phases which are at the emergency, relief and also at the rehabilitation phase. However, it is only the leaders and leadership had played their roles at the tsunami in Aceh more significantly, that would secured a lower rate of damage and loss in general.
Practical Implications for Leadership during Natural Disasters

The findings showed that incompetence and ineffective leadership is one of the major limitations during the disaster. The study also highlights the challenges for leadership in Aceh as the country is in the midst of their reconstruction and rehabilitation programs. The results or outcomes of the leadership will be an added knowledge not only to the notion of leadership but specifically towards the leadership in natural disasters. The aim is not to change the leadership in Aceh. However, its institutions should become places where reflective thought about the effective and ineffective use of power is nurtured. That requires the broadening the context of leadership to include transformative ends and means—those directed at securing greater measure of justice for all citizens.

While it may be impossible to pin point at any individual who have committed a mistake, a clear, culturally agreed and appropriate leadership and deputy pattern is advisable. It was found out from the study, if only the leaders at the community level would have played more significantly by doing some coordination tasks requested at the time of the disaster, the impact could be lessen especially in terms of distributing aids and assistance to the affected ones. Obviously, in order to spread the physical load during the impact and emergency phases of disaster (Carter, 1984; Clarke, 2010). Its responsibilities generally are:

- To keep the community informed about precautions to be taken, through public meetings and other means, including methods of warning. Special emphasis should be made prior to any clearly defined seasonal threat such as earthquakes or tsunami.
- To allocate responsibilities to persons in the community as necessary.
- To institute periodic inspections to ensure that precautions are being undertaken.
- To ensure that equipment required for disaster purposes is available and serviceable.
- To ensure emergency food supplies are available.
- To nominate special wardens on safety officers.
- To designate immediate task, these tasks need to be planned beforehand and made compatible with the plans of the next senior level of government.

Aceh’s tsunami taught us that there is a need to be aware and educate people at risk. Hence, crucial to helping, the fundamental possible ways to reduce damage and lives, to have better coordination after the disaster when a disaster strikes again, is the effective leadership. Indeed, Aceh needs to increase the effectiveness and scopes of its leaders. It is suggested Aceh requires leaders who emulate consistently the qualities that Robert Greenleaf (in Liu et al, 2011) sees in “service leaders,” those whom we call effective leaders. Lie et al asserted that these leaders cultivate and employ the four elements of integrated intelligence that characterized leadership as a way of being: emotional, moral, social and spiritual intelligence. Mastering and employing these capacities defines the true discipline of any leader who wishes to be a belief that there is an instinct for servant leadership in all for of us, high-born or low. In this context, it is recommended that this instinct can and should be discovered and nurtured throughout the citizenry. Indeed, the study’s underlying message is that for societies to work properly, efficiently and justly across the spectrum of economic, political and social life, effective leadership and effective citizenship are inseparable and interchangeable.

The above findings and discussion have made it apparent that one of the aims is to change the culture of leadership. It was revealed by the study, the tsunami had experienced the failure of leadership. In normal circumstances, most of the people reject the idea that things should be governed by a strong authoritarian leader with centralized power however, that style was absolutely required in responding effectively and immediately to tsunami in Aceh. It was a failure to concentrate and use power to save people, homes and communications for so long that deepened the immediate consequences of the disaster. This implies that effective leadership has
greater impacts on reducing damage of a disaster. The research findings clearly indicate that a rethinking to a new leadership culture is relevant for the rebuilding of Aceh after the tsunami.

**CONCLUSION**

The study sought to explore the problems of leaders and leadership from the tsunami in Aceh. It found that the leaders are not competent and ineffective leadership had caused severe damaged and continue to provoke unsatisfactory among people in the community. It can be concluded that although there is evident that there were limitations during the tsunami, effective leaders and leadership is inevitable. Therefore, it is understood, what possible should had been done remains to be done in terms of the reconstruction and rehabilitation, the roles of leaders had to be revitalized. Perhaps, a strong national leadership has to be rejuvenated within the culture. Especially, a region like Aceh outside community plays a significant role in recovery/development as well as emergency response. Therefore, leadership for a more equitable Aceh is indeed apt and timely. The findings add to the growing body of research on disaster specifically around the theme of leadership during disaster. Future research is needed to investigate the roles of leadership of other types of natural disasters.

**REFERENCES**


