

CULTURAL DRIVERS OF DISASTER RISK REDUCTION BEHAVIOUR



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THIS PROJECT IS ABOUT WHAT WENT RIGHT – A DISASTER WHERE THE WHOLE COMMUNITY RESPONDED IN EXACTLY THE RIGHT WAY, AT THE RIGHT TIME SAVING TENS OF THOUSANDS OF LIVES. THE STORY OF SIMEULUE ISLAND IS A RARE EXAMPLE OF A DISASTER RISK REDUCTION SUCCESS STORY AND MAY HAVE APPLICATIONS FOR AUSTRALIA.

RESEARCHING SUCCESS IN DISASTERS

Most media and research coverage of Disaster Risk Reduction ('DRR') focuses on the losses of life and property. The research has tried to identify how to avoid similar losses from BNH in the future. Very little research considers situations where losses have been avoided by effective DRR practices. (To be fair – examples of situations where whole communities have avoided disaster by their behaviour are rare – but there are some).

This project will focus on one example where DRR behaviours were highly successful in avoiding devastating loss of life in order to crystallize and develop those behaviours in Australia.

PULAU SIMEULE & THE 2004 TSUNAMI

The island of Simeulue off the coast of Sumatra was the first location struck by the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami but only a small number of lives were lost, while neighbouring areas had devastating losses.



- ▶ Around the Indian Ocean as many as 300,000 people were killed and millions made homeless with the greatest losses occurring in Sumatra only 150km from Simeulue.

WHY DO / DON'T PEOPLE PREPARE FOR DISASTERS?

International research (and much supported by the BNHCRC) has found that there are many reasons people don't prepare for disasters.



Regardless of what type of disaster, most of people are underprepared due to a range of cognitive biases including; unrealistic optimism bias, negative outcome expectancy, systematic failure to recognize risk as well as discounted self and community efficacy.

MYTHBUSTING THE LEGEND?

So lots of factors "get in the way" of good DRR behavior. Why didn't they effect people in Simeulue?

The legend of Simeulue has it that in 1907 a similar tsunami killed a great many people. Since then stories have been told saying "when the earth shakes – run to the hills". But earthquakes are very common in Simeulue – as many as 6 a year. Are people running to the hills every couple of months? What about 'warning fatigue'?

RESEARCH AIMS

The research aims to find out what it is about Simeulue's social and cultural settings which led to the "shut down" of the processes that have been found to "get in the way" of good DRR behaviours.

FIELD WORK

Field work is about to commence and involves interviews, observations and conversations with all sectors of the Simeulue community. Time spent on the island will provide an insight into the experience of living so close to the source of so many earthquakes and tsunami. This data will be compared to observed behaviours relating to crisis management, collective behaviour and other social practices. This information will be used to develop a model of Emergency Risk Management and Capacity Building that can be compared with other communities in Australia and elsewhere.

POTENTIAL OUTCOMES

As well as helping develop a global theory of Disaster Risk Reduction behaviour this project will help understand how to work with cultural structures to motivate communities and individuals to prepare for disasters.

By using the findings in risk communications agencies will be able to build community resilience, decrease losses caused by disasters and potential, reduce PTSD among staff and volunteers.

