

# **EARTHQUAKE RELIEF: SHIFTING ATTENTION?**

**Peter Smit**

Lecturer, Coastal Zone Management

Van Hall Larenstein

[peter2.smit@wur.nl](mailto:peter2.smit@wur.nl)

**Disaster Studies Working Paper 19**

**Aon Benfield UCL Hazard Research Centre**

[www.abuhrc.org](http://www.abuhrc.org)

**February 2009**

This paper is part of a series on challenges of creating effective disaster risk reduction partnerships . The series arose out of a panel on this theme at the World Conference of Humanitarian Studies in Groningen, The Netherlands, 4-7 February 2009 ([www.humanitarianstudies2009.org](http://www.humanitarianstudies2009.org)). It includes papers given at the panel and those of others who submitted papers but were unable to attend the conference.

*öThe local community is taken as the primary focus of attention since that is the common unit which is affected by disaster and, more importantly, responds to deal with the event.ö*  
Russell Dynes, 1991

## Abstract

---

*This paper discusses the processes during the relief phase after the occurrence of an earthquake. Major earthquakes result in disaster that outstretches the local, regional or even national capacities to deal with the consequences. International assistance is provided to rescue people from underneath collapsed buildings. However, more and more questions are raised if investment in local search and rescue capacity would not be more worthwhile. Although it is clear that local capacity can be degraded *cpf" ykmn" pqv" hwpevkqp" pqt o cmm{." chvgt" vjg" õ i qnfgp" rgtkqfö" tcvgu" qh" tguewg" dg ikp" vq" fko kpkuj" ftc o cvkecmm{="kpvgtpcvkqpcn" tguewg" vgc ou" ykmn" qpn{ "dg"* able to rescue a limited number of survivors alive.*

*In this paper the 2005 South Asia earthquake (with an emphasis on Pakistan) and the 2006 Yogyakarta earthquake in Indonesia are analyzed in order to provide more insight in the search and rescue of both earthquakes.*

*In the search and rescue phase, in Pakistan international assistance was provided, in Indonesia international assistance has not been required. This does not only have to do with differences in magnitude and consequently the number of victims and survivors, but also with the different local and regional capacities in both countries. For instance, the Indonesia Red Cross Society can provide basic services for up to 250,000 beneficiaries at the same time. In the immediate hours after the earthquake 400 staff and volunteers were mobilized. In Pakistan, little knowledge and understanding of how to respond at national, local or community levels was available. Strengthening preparedness mechanisms should be included in building local, national and regional capacities for response in emergencies.*

## Introduction

---

The 2005 South East Asia earthquake, in particular in the Pakistan region, has raised worldwide alarm, due to the large number of deaths and the inability to help many people, who after three weeks still had not been reached. Jan Egeland, the United Nations Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, verbalized these difficulties to reach survivors in the newspaper *Dar Al-Hayat* of 31 October 2005 as follows:

Aid workers in Pakistan have been hampered by a logistical nightmare the likes of which we have never seen, not even in the tsunami crisis. Several factors - the high altitude, mountainous terrain, the almost complete destruction of infrastructure in a huge swath of territory, ongoing landslides and aftershocks, and a harsh winter just days away, has made this the toughest logistical challenge the aid community has faced to date. The enormity of the challenge underscores the need for good cooperation on the ground to ensure that scarce resources are best utilized.

(Egeland, 2005)

An interesting question arises: Is Pakistan an isolated incident or a situation in which many existing problems of relief work occur simultaneously?

Alexander (2005) presents, amongst others, the following elements as part of the problems around preparedness and relief:

- Chronic lack of preparedness in an area whose susceptibility to large earthquakes is known in great detail
- Spectacular collapses, and associated heavy mortality, in large, modern, reinforced concrete buildings that were not constructed anti-seismically
- Vast numbers of homeless people, especially in inhospitable high mountain area where traditional housing has collapsed en masse
- Early relief largely in the hands of untrained, unequipped local people, especially regarding the rescue of trapped survivors
- Foreign rescuers arriving in large numbers (and at huge cost), but substantially be rescued from the rubble of collapsed buildings.

(Alexander, 2005: 1)

Even though the outcry of Egeland for good cooperation on the ground should be noted, Alexander argues that the story repeats itself; therefore this case is not an isolated one. The elements of chronic lack of preparedness, but in particular the early relief in the hands of local people and the late arrival of foreign rescuers, are supported by a report of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the Iranian Red Crescent Society, reviewing the response to the earthquake in Bam, December 2003 (IFRC/IRCS, 2004). The local

Iranian Red Crescent Society only had 10 sniffer dogs and no specialist equipment, but rescued approximately 1,000 people, while 35 international search and rescue (SAR) teams, arriving more than 36 hours after the event, saved only 25 lives.

This paper discusses in more detail the processes involved in the relief phase just after occurrence of an earthquake with an emphasis on the search and rescue phase, providing more insight into the contribution of local and regional as well as international operations. It addresses the question of whether or not it is useful to shift attention from international to local and regional capacity to make communities safer in earthquake-prone regions. Community-based disaster preparedness as an element of a disaster risk reduction approach is evaluated as a tool to increase the resilience of communities exposed to earthquake disasters.

---

**Background**

Resilienc EMC P MICID 0410 tes 12 T Tf1 0 0 1 2.024.3m JET EMC P MICID 0 BDC BTF1 12 ET0 0 1





*Table 1 Main Characteristics of Pakistan and Yogyakarta earthquakes*

	Pakistan	Indonesia
	Bagh, Muzzafarabad, Poonch (Kashmir), Abottabad, Battagram, Kohistan, Mansehra, Shangla (NWFP)	Yogyakarta, Central Java
Date	8 October 2005; 08:50 local time	27 May 2006; 05:53 local time
Magnitude	7.6 Richter	5.9 Richter
Number of people killed	73,338	5,778
Number of people injured	128,000	137,883
Number of people affected	0 <sup>1</sup>	2,340,745
Number of people homeless		

C-2(r)e7(a)4(tted on711d)-18(une4( )7 a)6(tea v)6(hrsio)JTJETQT1 0 0 1 4255.17497.03 Tm0( )JTJETBT1 0 0 1

*Peter Smit, Earthquake relief: shifting attention?*

Table 3 Primary Provider for each assistance category, 48 hours after the occurrence of the earthquake (in %).<sup>3</sup>

	Private Individual	Local Government	National Government	Military	INGO	Local NGO	Corporate	Religious Org.	Q: jgt\Fqp <sup>ow</sup> Know
Rescue	78	10	1	2					

*Peter Smit, Earthquake relief: shifting attention?*

*Aon Benfield UCL Hazard Research Centre, Disaster Studies Working Paper 19, February 2009*



---

## **Acknowledgements**

The idea to conduct research in this specific area originates from Prof. Thea Hilhorst, Disaster Studies, Wageningen UR. I like to thank her for providing me with the opportunity to carry out this research. Furthermore I would like to thank Mrs. Sally Griffiths (UN-OCHA), Silvia Llosa (UNISDR) and Dorothy Francis (IFRC) for their time.

---

## **References**

Alexander, 1996

Alexander, D (1996) The Health effects of earthquakes in the mid-1990s. In: *Disasters* Volume 20, Number 3, pp. 231 ó 247

Alexander, 2005

Alexander, David (2005) *Earthquake*

IFRC/IRCS, 2004

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the Iranian Red Crescent Society (2004) *Operations Review of the Red Crescent Movement Response to the Earthquake in Bam, Iran.*

Retrieved 1st November 2005 from:

[http://www.ifrc.org/cgi/pdf\\_evaluation.pl?eval04/Bam-operations-review.pdf](http://www.ifrc.org/cgi/pdf_evaluation.pl?eval04/Bam-operations-review.pdf)

IFRC, 2004

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (2004) *Indonesia Red Cross*

UNDP, 2007

UNDP (2007) *Community Based Disaster Risk Management ó Participantuø"Ocpwcn*. UNDP ó Pakistan. Retrieved 1<sup>st</sup> February 2009 from:

<http://www.undp.org.pk/images/practices/ENGLISH%20Participants%20Workbook%20Community%20Based%20Disaster%20R.pdf>

UNISDR, 2009

UNISDR (2009) *UNISDR Terminology on Disaster Risk Reduction (2009)* Retrieved 4<sup>th</sup> February 2009 from:

<http://www.unisdr.org/eng/terminology/UNISDR-terminology-2009-eng.pdf>