



Social Transformation and the Change of Community Capacity of Post-Tsunami Aceh, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The matter of community is of growing importance and intensively promoted in the development field through strengthening the concept of capacity. This paper aims to examine the dynamics of social transformation and their meanings for community capacity in Aceh province. The author points out the three phases of major social transformation, namely, the collapse of the social structure of local community under the centralist regime in the late 70s, following the isolation and high-tension period during the armed conflicts, and the post tsunami Aceh autonomy. The author argues that during these periods, community capacity has gradually declined in political-economic and socio-cultural terms. The post-reconstruction processes have raised awareness of living together in the community, providing a basis for institutionalising local governance, even though the capacity still remains weak due to the absence of local institutions and collective mechanisms due to three decades of changes concerning in national-local power relations and the consequent erosion of the social cohesion. In this paper, the author empirically discusses why and how the community has lost its collective mechanisms, especially during the recent social transformation, and how capacity has declined, focusing on *gampong* as the fundamental socio-spatial organisation at the local level, based on his fieldworks in the districts of Pidie, Aceh Besar and Banda Aceh.

Keywords: Social transformation, community changes, development capacity, post-tsunami Aceh

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INTRODUCTION

As the United Nations and other related organisations have noted that the matter of community is of growing importance and intensively promoted in the development

field, particularly in strengthening and empowering capacity. There is no single definition of what a community is. A community relates to both geographical and sociological perspectives. It is commonly defined as a collection of inhabitants living together in a particular geographical area with a common interest, sharing an emotional connection (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Dhamotharan, 2009; Vincent-II, 2009; Phillips & Pittman, 2009; Ife, 2002). This study employed the concept of community as an entity and as a social group (Tanaka, 2012), which refers to the aspect of locality and social structure as an important element of capacity. The concept of community capacity is often interchangeably used with community development. Many studies refer to the ability to identify and mobilise the needs for the community life through the collective action process (Goodman et al., 1998; Laverack, 2001; Chaskin, 2001).

As a community is dynamic, any particular interventions or events that potentially occur anytime – be they politics, economics, and environments – have consequences for community life. The more preparedness a community has, the more resilient it is to cope with and redevelop after any crisis. Often, access to and control over resources (social, political, and economical) are determinant factors of generating vulnerability, that is, the social condition of community (Wisner, Blaikie, Cannon, & Davis, 1994). Furthermore, understanding community capacity is often interconnected

with the concept of social change that is in turn closely related to the vulnerability – the inability to withstand adverse impacts to which exposed to the society. Thus, it is necessary to understand interrelationships between capacity, vulnerability and development for community changes from the grassroots perspective. For example, experiences of repeated events are accumulated as a subculture in the local knowledge and institutions, enhancing community capacity. For the long term, meanwhile, social changes undermine community cohesiveness, often causing vulnerability to crisis events. Therefore, the dynamic processes of community changes have two aspects: tension and adaptation.

Indeed, Aceh Province in Indonesia, which was the most severely damaged by the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, has suffered from enduring and massive social transformation for more than three decades; while more recently, there is new climate for political, economic and social development. This paper points out the three phases of major social transformation. The most significant process began in the late 1970s through massive political involvement under the centralist regime. The unification of the village governance system heralded the collapse of community, or *gampong*, in Aceh. Furthermore, the situation became unstable and communities marginalised and isolated due to the approximately thirty-year internal armed conflict between the Freedom Aceh Movement (GAM:

Gerakan Aceh Merdeka)¹ and the Central Government of Indonesia. Social and economic infrastructures were extremely poor during the time. The final phase is the 2004 devastating Indian Ocean tsunami and the decentralisation and reformation of local autonomy that followed. The province suffered the greatest loss of life and economic activities among the 14 affected countries (Cosgrave, 2007). This event has not only attracted huge global attention to respond and come to help but also had a deep influence on opening the door to peace (Gailard, Clave, & Kelman, 2008).

This study focuses first on the dynamics social transformations and their meanings for community capacity, and then argues that during these periods, community capacity has gradually declined in the political-economic and socio-cultural terms. Also, the massive and progressive post-tsunami intervention causes challenges for enhancing community capacity due to the absence of local institutions and collective mechanisms for development initiatives. The paper attempts to discuss why and how the community has lost its collective mechanism, especially during the recent social transformation and related to the

current development progress, focusing *gampong* as a fundamental Acehnese socio-spatial organisation at the local level.

The study employs qualitative and quantitative approaches to examine the dynamics of community changes. Data were obtained from the author's fieldwork in Pidie, Aceh Besar and Banda Aceh, Aceh Province through observation, interviews, group discussions, questionnaire survey and study of documents. In 2010, the author conducted a survey on the role of community in the reconstruction process of post disaster reached 200 community leaders. This survey used questionnaire that was designed in collaboration with Nagoya University, Japan, Gajah Mada University and Indonesian Institute of Sciences, Indonesia. Furthermore, the author intensively interviewed community leaders and conducted group discussions with community members to gain in-depth information related to the dynamics of community change and functions. In order to enrich the information, a household survey was also conducted in 2014, in collaboration with Nagoya University, Japan, with 355 households. In addition, the author also validated the data through documentation studies from previous research and reports and descriptively employed the gathered data in analysis process.

FRAMEWORK FOR THE COMMUNITY CAPACITY AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Social and geographical spaces are two key points to understand a community.

¹In 1976, there was a declaration in Pidie district stated the independent of Aceh region from the Republic of Indonesia by Hasan di Tiro, a former leader of the Freedom Aceh Movement (*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka –GAM*). The Central Government of Indonesia called this movement as a separatist and declared the Aceh region as unsafe area by sending a large number of troops to fight against the group.

First of all, it is necessary to elaborate these points, particularly in relation to community capacity. Hypothetically, the community that has strong cohesiveness is more capable and adaptable to certain crisis situations. Community cohesiveness cannot instantly be formed, and often a long and complex process is required involving how to utilise any potential resources within the spaces to improve the quality of life. As a process, it concerns with the ways to obtain and enhance the capability of inhabitants, leaders, organisations and

societies, which is in turn related to the outcome of the transformation. In this term, transformation is defined as a dynamics process of a fundamental change in society that encompasses alteration a wide range political, economic, social institutions and cultures. However, “if something does not lead to change that is generated, guided and sustained by those whom it is meant to benefit, then it cannot be said to have enhanced capacity, even if it has served a valid development purpose” (UNDP, 2009, p. 6).

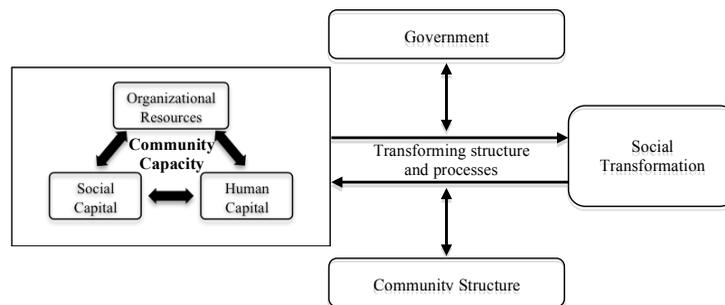


Figure 1. Community capacity and social transformation framework

The notion of community capacity is interconnected, and often overlaps with the concept of community competence, participation and empowerment. Chaskin (2001) in sum highlights the following factors to define community capacity: existence of resources, network of relationships, leadership, and supports for participation. In order to understand the relationships between community capacity and social dynamics, this study employs the definition of community capacity

as “the interaction of human capital, organizational resources, and social capital existing within a given community that can be leveraged to solve collective problems and improve or maintain well-being of a given community” (Chaskin, 2001, p. 295). In all situations, the dynamic process of changing community and capacity is interconnected, and constructed through the transformation of the government and community structures (Figure 1). The community, as an organisation,

intermediates between its members and other related organisations. The sense of existence on the one hand depends on how the organisation provides a proper and suitable environment for their members to be involved and participate in any activities. On the other hand, the capability to build and manage the relationships with wider society (organisations) is also necessary, particularly in relation to institutional capacity, to make partnerships and networking arrangements. The role of leadership is also of growing importance to provide direction for the collective goals. Thus, related to this kind of community connectedness, the power of community can be seen within the individual and collective structures to address community needs through solidarity and participation.

TRANSFORMING STRUCTURE AND PROCESSES OF THE ACEHNESE COMMUNITY

Social structure of the Acehese community

As a multicultural society, the social systems and structures in Indonesia are diverse at the local level. For a long time, strong social systems have been institutionalised in their very local contexts, embedded in cultural traditions, which are unique to each local society. Many studies have pointed out the characteristics of the local community in Aceh as having a multilayered institutional structure, which is composed of *mukim* at the sub-regional level and *gampong* at the local level. *Mukim* is a specific customary community institution that

consists of an alliance of several *gampongs*. *Mukim* is an intermediating socio-spatial organisation between the regional, local and neighbourhood in particular, related to access to and control over natural and/or social resources in the local territory. The governance structure of *mukim* has been transformed with the changing political constellation both at the regional and the national levels²: in short, during the Sultanate of Aceh, the old order era (1945-1979), the new order era (1979-1999) and post-reformation era (1999-current).

Gampong, as hierarchically the lowest unit of the structure, is a central organisation for community governance. Syarif (2005) defines *gampong* as the smallest entity of *adat* territory composed of several jurong (small alleys), *tumpok* (colony settlements) and *ujong* (boundaries). The territory is usually distinguished by topographic features such as rivers, fields, groves, hills or mountains (Afadlal, Cahyono, Gayatri, Dewi, & Satriani, 2008). *Gampong*, as a social organisation, has two features: as an administrative body and as a social entity. For a long time, *gampong* has been a local administrative and autonomous organisation, which has sovereignty for the social and natural resources within its territory through customary law (Syarif,

²See Moris (1985), Jaya & Dick (2001), Malley (2003), Ryaas Rasyid (2003), and Schmit (2008) about the historical and the dynamics process of decentralization policy in Indonesia in particular related to regional and national relations, structure and power.

2005). As a social entity, *gampong* is thought of as a communalist and kinship-based society, where the members are strongly connected to each other (social ties, solidarity and cohesiveness) (Schroter, 2010). As a kinship-based society, *gampong* is not only seen as a place where people are born but also as an original place of ancestors, cultural values and adhered-to traditions, the underlying powers of *gampong* (Mahdi, 2009).

Conceptually, the social body of *gampong* originally comprises a self-governing system, into which *adat* (customary law) and *syaria* (Islamic law) are embedded as a foundation of community life. The power structure of *gampong* is based on the balance of three domains of community life, each playing different roles and performing leadership collectively. Leadership is concretely performed by *keuchik* as a statutorily-selected leader (administrative), *tuha peut* dealing with *adat*, and *imeum* related to *syaria* function. The mosque/meunasah is central to community governance and the delivery of public services, with two faces: as a building and as an institution. As a building, mosque/meunasah is a place for praying, gathering and holding community events. It is also a metaphor of community life, showing the symbolic feature of existence, solidarity and the value of togetherness. Therefore, the institutional function of the mosque/meunasah is administrative, cultural and/or spiritual.

Regarding local resources and territorial management of them, the role of local community organisation³ is vital for the operational and the administrative, as well as providing guidelines and mechanisms to govern community life. The conditions for this kind of local community organisation depend on the availability of resources within the territory and the need for them. For example, for farming activities, the roles of *keujreun blang* are important, *peutua seuneubok* for plantations, *peutua uteuen* for forest management, *pawang laot* for sea and fishery management, and *peutua krueng* for river management, respectively. As the resources are usually distributed in a wider area, including neighbouring communities' territories, these local institutions also play a bridging and networking role. Such relations and mechanisms are mainly under the control of *mukim* at the sub-regional level.

³On the customary structure of community governance of *gampong* also consists several operational institutions in particular related to social and natural resources management as well as networking, neighbourhood and inter-community organisations, such as *keujreun blang* (water management and farming institution), *peutua seuneubok* (plantation institution), *peutua uteuen* (forestry institution), *peutua krueng* (river management institution), *pawang laot* (sea and fishery institution), and *haria peukan* (local market institution). According to the provincial regulation called the Qanun No5/2003, the establishment of these social institutions depends on the needs and resources available within community.

Outlining the Transformation in Three Phases

The Collapse of the Social Structure and Foundation of the Local Community.

The political climate of Indonesia has significantly contributed to the changes of socio-political systems and social life of *gampong*. In the late 1970s, there was a massive political pressure for the unification of local administrative systems throughout Indonesia. The central government under the Soeharto regime enacted Law No.5/1979⁴ on village governance. This policy led to the structural adjustment of community governance into the specialized administrative body that was called *desa/kelurahan*. The unification process to a greater extent neglected and diminished aspects of the locality and social system of *gampong* in Aceh (Syarif, 2005; Gayatri, 2009; Mahmuddin, Kolopaking, Kinseng, Saharuddin, & Wasistiono, 2014).

A self-governing community system had institutionally been transformed into a local-state governance system. The *mukim* system had been removed from the governance structure and only “performed” as symbolic *adat* leadership (McCarthy, 2006). This implied that *mukim* was not

necessarily significant for community governance. The collective power structure of *gampong* had also been changed into the single centralised leadership of *kepala desa* (head of village). Moreover, any related local social institutions had been removed and transformed into newly established formal social organizations. The role of *tuha peut* was turned from customary into governmental, called LMD (*Lembaga Musyawarah Desa* – village assembly) and LKMD (*Lembaga Ketahanan Masyarakat Desa* – village community resilience council). Under this structure, *kepala desa* gained more powers than the village council bodies (McCarthy, 2006). A similar change was faced by *imeum*, in that there was a separation between statutory, customary and religious matters, changing *gampong* as community entity to a local branch of the government.

The modernisation of the village governance system under this regime had severe impacts on the reduced operations of social organisations related to collective resource managements, with some taken over by the formal governmental organisations. For instance, the matter of agriculture, which was previously performed by *keujreun blang*, was assigned to P3A (*Perkumpulan Petani Pengguna Air* – the Farmer’s Water User Association). Quite a few traditional organisations gradually disappeared from the local community. Furthermore, most traditional community events and festivals gradually declined with the disappearance of local institutions. Instead, new types of community organizations were established

⁴The basic idea of the law was to introduce the substantive of the local autonomy, namely decentralisation, de-concentration and delegation of power; however, in the implementation, over controlled of the central government has led to the more centralisation of political structure and power (see Jaya & Dick, 2001).

under the control of the governmental authorities. The role of *mukim* for inter-community networking was also taken over by the government branches. The people in the community rarely took the initiative to manage local resources. Therefore, the *gampong* had increasingly become a local specialized administrative organization, losing comprehensive or all-embracing functions regarding space and society.

Under the regime, the central government extended domination through direct control of the regional and local development initiatives, covering wider areas of planning, intervention and delivery of development projects. The result of this centralist policy has triggered weakened local development capacity (Schmit, 2008). The local government became powerless and represented more an arm of the central government for implementing policies. The political atmosphere instead created new local elites to rule and control local resource utilisation as governmental agents (Afadlal, Cahyono, Gayatri, Dewi, & Satriani, 2008; Mahmuddin, Kolopaking, Kinseng, Saharuddin, & Wasistiono, 2014). This included local technocrats, bureaucrats, military, and businessmen, as well as *ulama* (the scholar of the religious elite), which were developed to carry out directed centralist development policies and counteract the powers in the society (Jaya & Dick, 2001; Miller, 2004).

The Period of Miserable Times and High Tensions: Isolation, Marginalisation and Underdevelopment. In the second

phase, the three-decade armed internal conflict between *GAM-Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* (Freedom Aceh Movement) and the central government was significant for the community changes in Aceh. The conflict culminated in the period 1989-2004 through the implementation of the military operation zone⁵ (1990-1998) and martial law (2003-2004). The period witnessed a great deal of violence and displacement. Due to security reasons, the central government sent and exploited the military force to combat the separatists, and sometimes people could even be unexpectedly targeted as rebels. People lived under the shadow of violence. During the operation, many people were kidnapped, tortured and even killed. Living in fearful situations, most people, especially men, moved out of the community to stay safe from being targeted as rebels by both conflicting parties.

In fact, the role of military forces was not only to combat the separatists but

⁵Due to high tension caused by armed conflict in Aceh, the Central Government of Indonesia deployed a large number of troops and declared a military operation area which also known as DOM (*Daerah Operasi Militer* – Military Operation Area) from early 1990 until late 1998 against the separatists movement of GAM. During the period, large-scale human rights abuses occurred, involved arbitrary executions, kidnapping, torture and disappearances, and the torching of villages. A report by *Forum Peduli HAM* (Human Rights Care Forum) in 1999 estimated at least 1,321 cases of people killed, 1,958 cases of people disappeared, 3,430 cases of torture, 128 cases of rape and 597 cases of torching.

also to take over community governance and activity. The function of *gampong* collapsed in administrative and social terms, increasingly becoming powerless. *Gampong* faced a dilemmatic situation and were intensively spied on by both parties. Often, a *gampong* was physically sacrificed, destroyed and sometimes burnt because it was suspected as supporting one side. Many properties and infrastructure were severely damaged and then abandoned by the authorities. The situation made the region underdeveloped, bridled, marginalised and isolated (McCulloch, 2005). The military forces indirectly took over *gampong* by building military barracks, which were often located at the centre of community space, called *meunasah*.

During the period, the local leadership lost its dignity and became merely a symbol. To be a community leader, such as *kepala desa*, was extremely dangerous. It was necessary for the *kepala desa* to have the ability to establish his/her position as a partner of the government and military, as well as GAM simultaneously, keeping the appearance as a community unit (Syarif, 2005). Therefore, it was rare to find people who were willing to be leaders at that time, being subject to intimidation (Thorburn, 2008). The informal leaders, such as *imeum*, faced similar conditions and even worse. The community activities, including *pengajian* (a holy *Quran* recital), that involved many people always became targets of the armed operation. Sometimes, the leaders were killed by 'unknown persons' during or after delivering the recitation. At that time, the

role of *imeum* was only to conduct prayers at *meunasah*. Thus, any particular community event and activity related to socio-cultural and spiritual matters was restricted and diminished significantly.

In many ways, the unstable and high-tension condition also contributed to the weakening community participation and social relations. Community power increasingly became poor and passive. All gatherings were monitored and restricted. Many people were scared to meet and to discuss anything related to their situations and lives. In many cases, the military facilitated meetings and forced people to attend, suspecting absentees to be dissidents. Even at the meetings, however, most of the participants hesitated to speak out and give their ideas.

Political efforts to ease tensions were made between conflicting groups. As some issues concerning security and local governance were taken as the fundamental topics, it became necessary for the central government to reform the local governance system through the special privilege law for Aceh in 1999 and the special autonomy law of Aceh in 2011. Also, the government revoked the status of the red zone⁶ and

⁶The military operation in Aceh was also known as *Operasi Jaring Merah* (Operation Red Net), whereas the region was marked with a red line as restricted and isolated area. In 2004 the status was suspended and came to an end, followed by downgrading to a civil emergency, but the military operation still continued.

decreased the number of troops in the region. However, those efforts were not significant and often unable to establish peace.

Mega-disaster: Between Misery, Miracle and Optimism. At the end of 2004, the devastating Indian Ocean tsunami occurred and destroyed human lives, properties, infrastructure and livelihoods, sweeping away wide areas of the coastal regions in Aceh Province. The tsunami had tremendous impacts: approximately 170,000 people lost, more than 500,000 people displaced, and total damage estimated at US\$4.45 billion. The World Bank report in 2008 noted that the economic condition of the province, which had slumped because of the conflict, became more severe because of the tidal wave. The report also said that at least more than 100,000 small businesses had collapsed, and that 60,000 farmers temporarily stopped farming.

Large-scale international responses suddenly arrived in and opened up the region. More than 500 organisations were involved in the relief and recovery efforts. As a result, the recovery process was relatively fast and extensive, covering wide areas of intervention. Within two years, for example, about 50% of the infrastructure needs such as housing, roads, schools, health centres, markets and other facilities had been reconstructed. In the beginning, there was no coordination of the interventions due to the absence of a response mechanism and lack of capacity of the governments. Later, the Rehabilitation and Reconstruction

Board, called BRR (*Badan Rehabilitasi dan Rekonstruksi*), was established as a coordinating as well as executing agency.

The tsunami led the region toward regional and international cooperation and relations to ease the internal armed conflict in Aceh (Gailard, Clave, & Kelman, 2008). Both sides of the conflict eased tension in the name of humanity. The Helsinki Accord was made in August 2005 as a foundation for achieving peace. The significant achievement of the agreement was changing the socio-political atmosphere by Law No.11/2006 on the governance of Aceh. It is a foundation and platform for restructuring the socio-political systems of the province. In 2006, a local election was successfully carried out and the local government was succeeded by the local party. From that point, the new era of the local regime was established, which engendered hope for the revitalisation of the Acehnese society.

Gampong was redefined in terms of the spatial and cultural concept, not only as a local administrative branch but also as a socio-cultural system. The construction of *gampong* governance is led by *keuchik*, that is, selected through the electoral process, wherein power is shared equally between *imeum meunasah* and *tuha peut*. However, in the process, there has been some confusion among the leaders about how to perform because of the lack of knowledge and experience. Therefore, in implementation, the role of *keuchik* is still dominant in perhaps all the related community activities. Realising such a situation, the governmental and non-governmental organisations have

intensively supported capacity building for community governance. Aceh Adat Council (*Majelis Adat Aceh*), Aceh Customary Community Network (JKMA – *Jaringan Komunitas Adat Aceh*), Green Aceh Institute and Prodeelat are some examples of the local organisations that intensively involved in reinforcement, advocacy and capacity building of *mukim* and *gampong* during and after the post-tsunami reconstruction period.

CHANGING THE COMMUNITY AND CAPACITY

The Acehnese society has seen drastic changes in community structure and capacity

during the three-decade socio-political processes. These changes are interrelated not only in administrative restructuring and social dynamics but also in changing relationships between the government and the community (Figure 2). In particular, the established traditional community-based institutions have been transformed into modernised local organisations, often imposed by the central government during the centralist regime. In this sense, *gampong* is no more than a local unit specialised in administrative function.

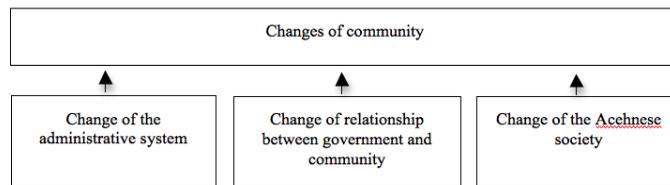


Figure 2. Changes in the community

The level of community wellbeing and capacity was gradually reduced in these periods. In the first phase, *gampong* as a unit of *adat* and *syaria* had institutionally been formalised as an administrative body under the centralisation of the Soeharto regime in the late 1970s. *Gampong* governance was politically imposed to adjust to the new system, changing the term of *gampong* to *desa/keurahan*. At the sub-regional level, some associations such as *mukim* and other

functional organisations were dismissed and removed from the community.

Based on the interviews and group discussions, many community leaders declared that they had lost their social roles and knowledge to a high degree vis-à-vis access to and control of local resources. The role of the newly established organisations was precisely defined by the authority as to pursue and implement any propaganda and policies of the highest government levels.

Table 1
Changing overall capacity of the community

	1 st phase (late 1970s)	2 nd phase (1990s)	3 rd phase (2004 and after)
Community	Adjustment from traditional to modernised community organisation	Declined mutual trust	Melting mutual distrust
Government	Centralised political structure	Deconstructed community organisation	Reconstructed community organisation
Inter-relationship of government and community	Establishment of local administration	Centralised political structure with military power rule	Peace agreement and withdrawal of military
	Less intervention	Enduring violent conflicts	Decentralised autonomy
	Dependence of local community	Specialized in administrative relation	Revived grassroots leadership with local governance institutions
	Declined grassroots leadership and local governance	No connection with grassroots mechanisms	Re-opened Acehese society
Acehnese society	Diminished socio-cultural coherence of the Acehese	Closed Acehese society	

Source: Primary data compiled by the author from the data finding

By degrees, they disassociated themselves from the traditional and customary systems and social activities, and were forced to adjust to the newly-established arrangement:

“For a long time, community activities gradually disappeared, everything being controlled by the highest authorities, community leaders such as tuha peut were practically diminished and replaced by LKMD and LMD ... and by the time we adjusted to the new system where such traditional system no longer existed ...over time the new generation was no longer aware how the customary governance is practiced, as you would think, nowadays there are many young people successfully being leaders, however, many of them are not aware and understand how to govern

and also lack of attitudes how to deal with community functions and needs.” (Tuha peut, male, 60 years old, Pidie).

“There were many things that changed in the governance system, the leadership style and access and control of gampong resources. Everything was under control of the authorities, and we as local people and leaders had no power to speak out against the highest structure. Everything was appointed and regulated.” (Keuchik, male, 50 years old, Aceh Besar).

A study of the dynamics of village institutions in Aceh (Afadlal, Cahyono, Gayatri, Dewi, & Satriani, 2008) shows the process of degrading *gampong* capacity.

Gampong lost its social powers, being represented just as a local administrative agent, to gain approval for development projects and policies from the community people. The study also stated that the state-dominated control not only eliminated the *gampong* autonomy, but also gradually generated passive attitudes. In term of leadership, *keuchik* (*kepala desa* –village head) was only a single formal leader and played a significant and dominant role as a government agent. The relationship between the community members and *gampong* gradually changed to be more formal. Further, the new structure increasingly loosened social relations in the former tight-knit community. At the same time, community activities tended to be built-in into the governmental programmes.

The situation became more severe under the military regime during the conflict period. The region was not only isolated but also socio-economically marginalised. The conflict brought high tensions and pressures to the communities. Just like the physical and human destructions mentioned above, poverty rates grew significantly because of the impacts of the conflict. According to the interviews and the survey of 200 community leaders in Aceh in 2010, majority of *gampong* (over four-fifths of the sample) experienced direct impacts from the conflict, which claimed more than half the people in the worst case.

“What we can say is, during the conflict, we could not do anything, everyone hesitated and worried to go to the fields or plantations, in many cases

people disappeared when going to the fields, and never came back ... lack of income, oppression, poverty, widows and orphans were common everywhere ... that was a gloomy period for us.” (*Keuchik*, male, 53 years old, Aceh Besar).

“The conflict was very depressing for our living ... everything was awful, people gathering was prohibited, there were many spies even among the inhabitants ... sometimes people were suddenly called by the military with no reason or explanation, interrogated ... and even some disappeared after that ... social life was poor, increasing mutual distrust ... everything should follow the military orders ... we had no roles and functions at all, only to follow the commands of what they said.” (*Tuha peut*, male, 60 years old, Pidie).

Through the centralist political development, the central government enlarged its powers and controlled almost all domains of development activities, with some placed under the direct control of the military operation. The characteristic of *gampong* as simply an administrative agency was strengthened to follow the directions of the military rule within the hierarchical structure. As mentioned above, the power of community leadership was extremely low. Community leaders mentally and physically received intense pressure from both conflicting parties. All the community

movements were systemically watched and controlled by the military forces. Under this kind of circumstance, many people tended to think selfishly due to security and safety reasons. As a result, the mutual trust among community members, community cohesiveness and social networks increasingly weakened. Thus, the weakened social institutions, poor leadership and lack of social interactions in turn weakened community capacity itself during this period.

The third phase of the changes is the post-tsunami era, in which the decentralisation regime started. The large number of rapid global humanitarian actions was the beginning of the re-opening the region from isolation. The post-tsunami interventions, especially following the peace agreement, provided a new climate and triggered the development progress in the province. The programmes of decentralised autonomy began through the reinforcement and restructuring of local capacity. Reorganising community governance from the grassroots level progressed through redefining *gampong* (Mahdi, 2009) not only as a local state agent but also having extended access to and control over their own affairs autonomously. In the new structure, there is a growing consideration that the power of community is necessary to generate and enhance locality-based capacity.

At the organisational level, the political situations of stability and security after

the peace agreement have guaranteed the reinforcement of restructuring community-based organisations and the community governance system, though the transformation process is fluid and challenging. Some studies have illustrated the condition of lose of capacity (Afadlal, Cahyono, Gayatri, Dewi, & Satriani, 2008; Thorburn, 2008; MSR, 2010; Mahmuddin, Kolopaking, Kinseng, Saharuddin, & Wasistiono, 2014) of the Acehnese *gampong* under the centralised political structure, the internal armed conflict and the mega earthquake and tsunami. To sum up, the studies argue that reinforcement of institutional arrangements and leadership are critical for *gampong* re-development. According to the interviews with community leaders, almost all of them perceive that the most urgent issue to be faced is organisational and personal adjustment from the former authoritarian regime that has been institutionalised into the current systems for a long time. The traditional system of self-governing community is reintroduced, combining with the modernisation of state governance. This means that it is necessary to re-establish and reinforce sub-regional social organisations such as *mukim*, *panglima laot*, *keujreun blang*, *peuteu seuneubok* and so on into the government structure based on community needs for usage and management of resources. However, a considerable number of community leaders are claiming a lack of awareness and understanding about the new

system. Most of the informants mentioned lack of knowledge and experience, some generation gap – stagnant information transfer from generation to generation – as well as lack of organisational capacity.

“There are many things that should be considered after the peace [agreement], especially reestablishment of gampong, mukim and other local institutions, however, in practice there is some confusion. I think that many of us lack understanding and knowledge about the local system ... we have become accustomed to the old system and practice ... therefore, capacity building of local governance is very helpful to increase awareness and knowledge in accordance with local needs.” (Keuchik, male, 48 years old, Banda Aceh).

“With the new regulation, the local system has been reestablished through gampong, tuha peut, mukim ... which is in accordance with the Acehnese local culture ... however, in the implementation, there are a lot of things to be addressed, such as understanding of how to execute ... of course there is nothing wrong in the old system, but some adjustments are necessary.” (Tuha Peut, male, 55 years old, Aceh Besar).

In response to these situations, along with the reconstruction activities, the government and aid agencies have conducted some programmes for capacity building through

training and mentoring throughout the province, focusing on organisational developments, community leadership and social capital. According to the interviews, perhaps almost all of the community leaders claimed that the capacity building programme is increasingly significant, especially for community participation and involvement in *gampong* development planning and collective works. Also, the role of an appointed facilitator, who has worked closely with the community, is important. However, in many ways, the participation is still showing instability and weak, especially after the programme finishes. According to the questionnaire survey conducted in 2014 targeting 355 households, almost half of respondents stated that the community-related organisations, especially small groups, are the most important organisations for the reconstruction process (Table 2). In the group, local people were expected to act collectively, gaining assistance from supporting bodies. However, the respondents’ satisfaction with community

Table 2
The most important organisation for community reconstruction

Organisation	Percentage (N:355)
Small group	33.0
Governments	15.2
Private network (family, relatives)	13.2
Community organizations	9.6
Mosque/Meunasah	5.9
Cooperative	0.3
NGOs/United Nations	0.3
Others/No answer	22.3

Table 3
Satisfaction with community activity and participation

Satisfaction	Percentage (N:355)
Very satisfied	6.8
Satisfied	47.6
Not so satisfied	39.7
Not at all	5.9

Source: Primary data from the questionnaire survey about community settings and functions on the post-tsunami reconstruction of land-use-type primary production in Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar, January 2014

activity and participation is not high (Table 3), showing a gradual decline from the beginning. It is implied that there are some serious problems to be addressed, especially in relation to awareness, need and attachment to the community.

A report of *gampong* ten years after the tsunami by ACARP LOGICA (Thorburn & Rochelle, 2014) shows similar situations; that is, the capacity of community institutions involving participatory and/or training programmes has progressively been enhanced. However, many cases are reported in which the capacity is gradually falling off after the completed reconstruction activities. Closure of financial and technical supports from the local and national governments makes it difficult for the community to maintain the activities. The study shows some successful cases in which maintenance of the activities is to a large degree dependent upon the roles of local leaders such as *keuchik* and *tuha peut* and

their mutual collaboration, as well as their networking sometimes extending outside of the community.

In terms of physical and economic developments, indeed, the post-tsunami intervention shows progressive significance; however, in terms of social capacity development, there still remain many challenges that are related to the scale of aid influx and the ways of outside aid. Certainly the interventions by donors, governments and NGOs were so large that the reconstruction work could rapidly and progressively be done (Telford, Cosgrave, & Houghton, 2006), some places being even better than before the tsunami. However, there are some critics, in particular, of the intervention process. For example, Telford (2012) argues that the relatively powerful and wealthy intervention by aid agencies in many cases neglected and even undermined the capacity that the local community had originally held, and that local people often felt exploited rather than reinforced. Thus, this kind of ignorance of the local capacity led to people's passive and materialistic attitudes to a large extent, which might in turn cause difficulties for the community to overcome possible problems related to their future. In this way, the community leaders argue that many people tend to be stubbornly unwilling to participate in their own community activities. Indeed, it is increasingly important for them to gain the direct personal benefits from participating in the activities. The more the benefits, the more people would come.

Table 4

Perception of community leaders on the level of community change in comparison to before the tsunami

	Level of change (percentage) (N:200)		
	High	Average	Low
Social activity	36.5	42.5	21.0
Mutual trust	44.5	45.0	10.5
Social change	34.0	41.5	24.5

Source: Primary data from questionnaire survey about the role of community in the reconstruction process of post-earthquake/tsunami 2004 in Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar in 2010

In comparison to the situation of ten years before the tsunami, Table 4 shows the level of community changes again according to the questionnaire survey with 200 community leaders in 2010, as mentioned above. Approximately one-third of leaders said that social activity such as *gotong royong*, *pengajian*, community events and so on had increased, while approximately 42.5% claimed no change, and approximately one-fifth answered that it was less active. To some degree, social activity was gradually revitalised in line with the improvement of the socio-political and economic structures of the region. Regardless of an improvement in social activity, in particular focusing on *gotong royong*, the frequency of participation was still relatively small. More than a half of the respondents stated once every two months, followed by approximately 32% claiming once a month, only 4.5% indicating once every two weeks and 3% once a week. Related to the participation rate, the majority claimed that the rate is relatively high and almost half of the community members

participate, while approximately 10% stated only a few people participated.

The decentralised administration and the reconstruction of gampong further show a positive impact on the interrelationship between the government and the community, and also improving social relations and connectivity among the community members. Clearly identifying the community organisations in the local government structures is increasingly significant for restoring the trust relationship between the governments. Restoring community leadership could possibly make passive attitudes of community people more active. For this, the charisma based on the ability of leaders to make networks is significant to a large degree in rebuilding the trust that was lost during the past decades. In terms of social relations and connectivity among the members, the survey also showed a positive result of reviving community trust. For example, approximately 44.5% of the respondents perceived that harmony and mutual trust had been increasing comparing to the pre-tsunami periods, while

about 45% claimed there was little change. Nevertheless, about 10.5% of respondents claimed that mutual distrust still existed.

In terms of the overall changes in the Acehnese society, approximately one-third of the respondents claimed that the society had changed significantly, while about 41.5% of respondents indicated little change, and approximately one-fourth perceived no change. The survey also indicated that the most significant change occurred in the most severely affected communities, where almost half of the respondents felt significant changes in the Acehnese society. Perhaps this is because these communities experienced a drastic change in their social structure through population turnover, where instead of the lost population many newcomers rushed in after the tsunami. This means that in such places the history of *gampong* community has just begun, or is changing its established characteristics to something like a mixed society whether or not it is still in the original place or has been relocated.

CONCLUSION AND REMARKS

Massive socio-economic and political interventions by the governmental and non-governmental organisations are significant for changing community capacity in the post-tsunami Aceh. The lack of political participation, in the sense of local people collectively participating in the political process of the community and in which the local community actively participated in the formal administrative structures of the nation state, from the Soeharto

regime onward, has led to ignorance of the community in the local political arena, erosion of the community organization and other social institutions, breakdown of communication between generations within the community, the demise of local knowledge management, and the failure of community governance. All these have diminished community capacity for a long time. The post-tsunami regime has opened up the re-establishment of the community structures through capacity building programmes, redefining *gampong*. However, the process of restructuring *gampong* as a socio-spatial unit of local community is still challenging. For developing the community capacity of the Acehnese *gampong* today, at least, four issues should be discussed: first, restructuring means not only reorganisation of *gampong* but also renovation of knowledge, understanding and skill about the *gampong* governance. The adaptability of *gampong* to the new community governance system is relatively challenging because of the former authoritarian system and practices that have been embodied and institutionalised into the local state system. The current tasks of *gampong* governance are not only limited to administration and development but also expected to cover the extent of *adat* and *syaria*.

Second, in this sense, for *gampong* governance it is important to rearrange the relationships with the sub-regional organizations and to readjust power and authority. At the sub-regional level, *mukim* is currently intermediating between *gampong*

and *kecamatan*. *Mukim* is *de jure* entitled to similar functions as *kecamatan*, conducting government affairs, implementation of development activities, community development, and reinforcement of *syaria* law, though these functions are *de facto* exercised still by *kecamatan* and the role of *mukim* is limited rather to *adat* and *syaria*. Lack of inter-organisational coherency is probably due to absence of social mechanisms that have been evaporated and transferred into the formal administrative institutions. In practice, only the formal channel is alive for problem solving even at the community level. Further, *gampong* has statutorily extended their power and authority to meet the requirements as an administrative body as well as a socio-political authority. *Gampong* has to incorporate statutory, customary and Islamic laws in its governance. Thus, it is necessary to provide a certain mechanism to deal with complex issues of social life, including not only the administrative but also the common practice that is embedded in the local culture.

Third, thus, it is evident that leadership is an important determinant factor for community rebuilding. There is a common sense that *keuchik* as the head of a village is entitled to the power to govern, balancing between the social and the political. A range of political transformation has changed the status of *keuchik* from a comprehensive power elite to a more formal administrative agent. The power of influence of *keuchik* is accordingly declining, especially in decision-making on community needs.

Meanwhile, the level of people's trust in local governments, which increasingly dominate the realm of community, has gradually if not drastically improved after the tsunami. For practices of development and resource allocation to secure legitimacy among the people of the community, it is necessary above all for *keuchik* to regain his/her power of influence not only in the administrative but also in the cultural dimensions. Then, a partnership between the community and the government could be constructed, strengthening *gampong* governance based on the roles of local leaders to balance power and authority.

Lastly, the recovery processes emphasise the necessity of small group activities to mobilise, utilise and maintain social and physical resources as the means to encourage and reinforce social cohesion and capital that eroded during the conflict period. Community involvement is one of the determinant factors for the efficient and sustainable recovery process. In fact, for a long time, the Acehnese society has in many ways been excluded from a variety of development activities. Further, the absence of community involvement and participation during the post-tsunami reconstruction process poses some critical problems to the community. Indeed, there was lack of consideration about the importance of a community at the beginning of intervention as part of the sustainable physical and economic achievements. Later on, there were efforts to establish small groups within the community as an empowerment activity such as *kelompok tani/nelayan* (farmer/

fishermen group), *kelompok pengajian* (Quran recital group), *kelompok arisan* (social gathering group), *kelompok wanita* (women group), *posyandu* (maternal and child health care), *kelompok pemuda* (youth group) and so on. However, in many cases, the initiatives for group building were not necessarily growing from the grassroots but promoted from the top down, especially from the authorities, in particular for the community to access economic and financial resources. Whether the collective work of such small groups is successful or not often depends on the leader's personal connections to outside social resources. This kind of dependency and individualism poses complex issues to the sustainability of group activities. On some level, the need for group building is high; however, the sense of collectiveness is relatively low among the members. Therefore, it is necessary to continue observing how such small groups are institutionalised into the politics and embedded into the culture of the Acehese community.

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