



SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT NOTES

CONFLICT PREVENTION & RECONSTRUCTION

No. 22 / August 2005

Conflict and Recovery in Aceh: An Assessment of Conflict Dynamics and Options for Supporting the Peace Process

On August 15th the Government of Indonesia and the GAM signed a Memorandum of Understanding aimed at ending almost 30 years of armed conflict in Aceh. This note summarizes the results of a rapid conflict assessment prepared by the World Bank to understand conflict dynamics, to analyze possible scenarios after signing of the agreement, and to identify tools and mechanisms that the government, donors, and other stakeholders could use to support the peace process. The assessment was carried out from July 26 to August 19, 2005.

On August 15th, 2005 the Government of Indonesia (GoI) and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) signed a peace accord in Helsinki aimed at ending a 30-year armed conflict which has resulted in almost 15,000 deaths. Changes in the political environment—and in the demands of both sides—have allowed for the development of an agreement that many see as being the best hope for peace in Aceh for years. Many of the most crucial lessons from the failed Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (COHA) of 2002-03 appear to have been learned. The current agreement represents a more comprehensive strategy for bringing peace to Aceh, with many of the social, political and economic factors that have kept Aceh in a state of perpetual war since the failure of COHA considered by the authors of the peace agreement, even if not all of them are fully addressed.

Yet while the agreement is more holistic, and the political will from both sides is seemingly stronger, many challenges remain. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) outlines just the bare bones of a settlement. Many issues remain unresolved. Implementation details are unclear. The agreement has largely involved elite actors on both sides, with civil society actors and the communities they represent given little space to contribute. There is a massive perceived gap between the discussions in Jakarta, Helsinki and, to a lesser extent, in Banda Aceh, and realities on the ground for those in the regions. The signing of the accord does not in itself bring peace. Whether the conflict ends and peace is sustainable will depend very much on the ways in which a range of different actors (including the combating parties, but also others) work through the myriad issues that will arise post-August 15th.

This note summarizes a preliminary assessment of conflict dynamics on the ground in Aceh today, and, particularly, of how the conflict is experienced by the people who make up the vast majority of the populace of this beautiful but tragic place: rural Acehnese villagers.ⁱ The note does not seek to analyze the conflict at the macro-level or the intentions of elite actors, including the TNI (Indonesian Armed Forces) GAM

leadership and the Government of Indonesia. Instead, it assumes these parties are willing to find a solution to the conflict, and considers the *local* dynamics that may make or break the agreement. The paper combines a consideration of the broad dynamics of the conflict (with a focus on events post-tsunami) with an exploration of the views of different local actors, their incentives, and the agency they have to either spoil, or consolidate, the accord. Consideration of this, as well as of the broad political dynamics in Jakarta and Banda Aceh, is necessary in comprehending the likelihood of the agreement contributing to a sustainable peace in Aceh. It is also necessary to help illuminate the ways in which the World Bank and others can help support the peaceful development of Aceh in years to come.

The assessment was conducted from July 26th - August 19th, 2005 and utilized a number of methods: key informant surveys of facilitators from two Bank funded local development projects (the Kecamatan Development Project and the Support for Poor and Disadvantaged Areas Project);^{ii iii} newspaper conflict monitoring; two field trips to eight districts plus discussions in Banda Aceh; a review of lessons learned from COHA and other peace processes; and interviews with Acehnese in Medan and Jakarta.

The note consists of four parts. Section 1 gives a brief overview of conflict on the ground in Aceh today, using survey and qualitative data. Section 2 sets out potential scenarios post-August 15th, with an emphasis on dynamics that could negatively impact upon the likelihood of sustainable peace. Section 3 gives suggestions for broad tools that development actors, such as the World Bank and others, may use to address these, and, more broadly, to support the peaceful recovery of Aceh, and outlines principles for conflict-sensitive development planning. Section 4 concludes.

I. Conflict Dynamics in Aceh Post-Tsunami

Despite the fact that conflict levels dropped immediately after the tsunami, they have been steadily increasing over the year

and since the beginning of this year, 178 deaths and 170 injuries have resulted from 108 GAM-GoI conflict incidents. However, both incidents of conflict and their violent impacts are concentrated in four “hot spots” districts: North Aceh, South Aceh, East Aceh and Bireuen. With the exception of South Aceh, these districts are on the east coast of Aceh, which has traditionally been GAM’s stronghold.

However, there is both quantitative and qualitative evidence to suggest that the conflict is moving west, and particularly to South Aceh district. Indeed, conflict levels have risen sharply in South Aceh in the past two months (June and July) whereas levels have dropped off in central and eastern Aceh. This is due to two factors: one, GAM members from other parts of Aceh are moving west to seek protection; and, two, the command line within the GAM leadership functions less well in the west coast region.

Although conflict incidents are concentrated, conflict’s impacts on human security and perceptions of safety are felt across the province. In almost every district, villagers told us of how their lives are affected. Many are unable to tend their forest gardens, the center of most village economies, for fear of running into GAM who have retreated to the foothills. Similarly, tension between those who nominally sympathize with GAM and those who sympathize with GoI is high across the province, regardless of recent local conflict incidents. Highly relevant for targeting purposes, these cleavages exist within villages. Sympathies for either GAM or GoI tend to be at the household level and therefore differences of opinion and mistrust exist within villages. Cleavages along ethnic and religious lines are weak.

The main forms of GAM-GoI related conflict continue to be firefights between armed actors and kidnapping which almost always involves civilians. Extortion is rampant across the province, particularly on main highways, and is almost entirely carried out by the TNI and the police. Sweeping is more common in “black areas”, that is villages that, according to the TNI, sympathize with GAM. More positively, militias or anti-separatist groups, as they are more commonly referred to in Aceh, are unlikely to be a problem. They have very little legitimacy in the eyes of communities—many members are reluctant recruits—and in the past six months have been involved in almost no incidents (total of 3 incidents in East Aceh and Lhokseumawe in 2005).

Local community leaders are the key dispute resolution actors. Even for GAM-GoI related conflicts, the Village Head often plays a key role, for example in negotiating in kidnapping cases and settling disputes relating to extortion. Despite the conflict, community leaders have managed to maintain the trust and faith of their communities. Their participation in socializing and monitoring the peace process, as well as in facilitating the trust required for development projects, will be crucial.

II. Obstacles to Peace: Possible Scenarios Post-August 15th

There are a number of potential scenarios that could undermine the peace agreement.

Incentives for Resistance and Security Concerns

One set of spoilers is local actors—including GAM combatants, the TNI and the police—who will resist the implementation of the peace agreement because of economic incentives and/or ideological reasons. Particularly at the sub-district level, these actors possess considerable scope for autonomous action and many are involved in illegal activities on the side. Maintaining control over these actors will require the use of both sticks and carrots.

Monitoring Capacity

Partly because there are spoilers within the ranks of both sides, as well as because the high levels of distrust between GAM and GoI, an independent third party monitor has been charged with overseeing the peace process. The list of tasks that the Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM) is responsible for is vast. There is a risk that this team will be unable to satisfactorily cover and respond to all incidents and all aspects of its mandate. How local people view the team, and understand its role, is key.

Reintegration of GAM

Thirty years of conflict has eroded trust and relations: amongst communities, between communities and the state, as well as between communities and GAM. Communities could reject GAM because of past abuses or because of the fear that welcoming back ex-GAM combatants with open arms will put them at risk. Similarly, the provision of significant support and aid to ex-GAM combatants could result in serious tensions and social jealousies among other victims of conflict.

Population Movements and Village-level Conflict

Over the course of the conflict, large numbers of transmigrants and Acehnese fled the province. Their return post-August 15th could cause problems relating to property, including land, left behind. Although the numbers of returnees is unlikely to be high in the short-run, the conflict may have weakened the capacity of village level mechanisms to handle these issues.

The two most problematic obstacles, at least in the short-term, will be managing local resistance and crime, as well as ensuring the smooth integration of ex-GAM combatants. There is a significant chance that even if the peace agreement is successful at the macro-level (e.g., in ending the decades-long conflict between the GoI and GAM), that the conflict will fragment and morph from that of a separatist struggle (and government’s attempt to control it), to one underpinned by *local* economic interests and criminality (*premanism*). If this occurs, in the short-term the Aceh Monitoring Mission is likely to struggle to fulfill its mandate to investigate and adjudicate on apparent violations. In the longer-term, existing security and judicial institutions will have problems controlling these activities without developing greater trust and legitimacy from communities.

There is a risk that early mistakes in the reintegration of GAM members could derail the whole peace process. All those who have a stake in reintegration, including receiving communities, GAM leadership and combatants, and the GoI, will watch this process, which is set to begin on the 15th September. It will be a litmus test for both Jakarta and GAM's good intentions (and their ability to control their armed members). Success will depend on getting the incentives and messages right. The schedule is tight.

III. Intervention Mechanisms and Principles for Development Actors

There is significant scope for donors such as the World Bank to support the peace process. Generally, development actors should think about interventions in the following areas:

- Socialization of the peace process
- Bringing people in to the process
- Reintegration of GAM
- Provision of a peace dividend
- Institution building

Socialization of the Peace Process

The importance of disseminating the content and processes of the peace agreement cannot be understated. This could be done in a number of ways:

- Support existing networks and mechanisms, including civil society actors, religious and local media networks.
- Consider creating a fund within one of the existing multi-donor trust fund already established to help Aceh recover from the tsunami—that local organizations could apply to for funding for socialization activities.
- Utilize KDP's comprehensive socialization network. In particular, hire another 45 KDP Information Facilitators in order to expand their coverage to include all of Aceh.
- Develop a multi-media based awareness campaign that uses community radio, newspapers, and religious networks to promote local awareness and dialogue over the peace agreement.

Bringing People in to the Process

A major weakness of the Helsinki process has been the lack of involvement of Acehnese civil society. Their inclusion in implementing the peace process is of particular importance. There are multiple ways to ensure their inclusion, including:

- Public dialogues at the district and sub-district levels to elicit communities' social and economic development needs; build dialogue around mechanisms for peace; and improve information flows.
- Commission a series of publicly-announced needs assessments. These should cover:
 - Ex-GAM combatants' reintegration needs;
 - Survey of local government needs, including assessments of schools, health clinics and other public infrastructure; and,
 - Surveys of the justice and security sector.
- Support cultural events that tap into the community's widespread desire for an end to conflict and hopes for peace.

- In the longer-term consider truth and reconciliation mechanisms that relieve the burden and heal the memories of past violence and abuses.
- Support local level monitoring programs that augment and complement the AMM.

Reintegration of GAM

Program development for the reintegration of GAM is already underway. Those designing such programs should consider the following suggestions:

- We suggest that the DDR (Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration) programs be given a name and acronym that means more to local people. One suggestion is to rename the program P-KBG. This stands for *Pulang Kampung, Pulang Barak, Pulang Gudang* (Going home to the village, Going home to the barracks, Giving back the weapons).
- In order to ensure support to receiving communities, consider issuing returnees with a voucher that is redeemable upon reentry into a village. The voucher would provide a set amount to the returnee (either in cash or kind) but would also provide a set amount to receiving communities.
- Use *Ulamas* (religious leaders) to add legitimacy and to aid in reconciliation.

Provision of a Peace Dividend

The cornerstone of a donor strategy to support the peace process should be the provision of widespread development programming in areas previously affected by conflict. Complementary peace dividend activities in the immediate, medium, and longer-term could include:

- Highly visible immediate activities:
 - rebuilding and/or repainting health posts and schools (the latter were often targeted in the conflict);
 - rebuilding bridges (many destroyed by conflict) through cash-for-work programs; and
 - clearing trails to forest gardens (many of which became inaccessible due to the conflict).
- Medium term: We suggest that more money is put through the next round of KDP and other community projects across Aceh to ensure that all villages receive a project through the program.
- 2006-onwards: SPADA, which expands the scope of the community work to include joint community–local government planning and service delivery, could be expanded to the remaining districts in Aceh; if the first round of SPADA is successful, more money could be channeled through the program.
- Livelihoods programming.

Institution Building

There is widespread dissatisfaction with the state of governance in Aceh. Further, the MoU maps out significant changes to the structure of governance in Aceh.

Donors should support a transition to accountable, transparent and participatory governance in Aceh. Concrete support could include:

- Provide technical and funding support for those responsible for the implementation of the MoU's governance agenda.
- Commission a Public Expenditure Review at the provincial and district levels.
- Strengthen and support *Rakorbang* (Development Coordination Meetings).
- Support the establishment of a joint team to monitor and control illegal logging.
- Commission a comprehensive needs assessment of the justice sector. Specifically, focus on both the capacity of the Courts and Prosecutor's Office to "supply" justice as well as the capacity of civil society and communities to "demand" justice.

Security Sector Reform

Support will also need to be provided for security sector reform. Police will have new and unfamiliar roles (and have been a problem in the past). There are many arms and armed groups circulating in Aceh. Research from elsewhere shows that prompt, well-managed police responses do actually stop local conflicts from spiraling upwards. Areas to focus on include:

- Commission a comprehensive needs assessment of the security sector. Lessons could be learnt from a World Bank participatory research program that looked at how police at the district and sub-district level in East Java and Flores learn and respond to problems.
- USAID and Japan have been sponsoring programs elsewhere in Indonesia that have already shown promise and can be brought to Aceh.
- Bringing credible reformists might be useful as would be providing high-level backup for the provincial police in Aceh.
- Addressing issues related to illegal economic activities conducted by the security sector in Aceh, such as taxes, military businesses, etc.

Conflict-Sensitive Development Principles

It is important that development interventions are implemented in ways that take into account the history of conflict and how development interventions interact with conflict dynamics. Development actors in Aceh should consider the following conflict-sensitive development principles:

• Distributional issues and targeting

Programs targeted at particular population groups, at the expense of others, are more likely to be problematic than those targeted more widely.

• Community-driven approaches

Community projects that use demand-driven approaches are more likely to reflect actual community needs and receive buy-in.

• Concentrate on processes as well as outputs

The processes development programs utilize are more likely to contribute to sustainable peace than their outputs.

• Build-in complaints mechanisms

Clear and transparent complaints mechanisms can help to prevent conflicts when problems do occur.

- *Focus on ensuring transparency and accountability* to limit corruption and suspicion

• Use independent civil society

Civil society is surprisingly strong, if over-stretched, in many districts of Aceh. It is a vital resource.

• Don't forget the Government

Long-term and sustainable strategies must involve provincial and district level governments.

• Provide support to field staff

Field staff, such as local facilitators, are often over-looked. In a conflict context they are on the front-lines and thus require extra support. Consider: conflict resolution and negotiation training; strong and responsive reporting structures; and early warning information systems for when things go wrong.

IV. Conclusions

The unprecedented response (national and international) to the tsunami has created opportunities for a response to the conflict in Aceh. Human resources and aid delivery mechanisms are already in place. In many parts of Aceh, those affected by conflict, and especially those in the mountainous interior, are now worse off than those who were directly impacted by the tsunami. Villages in conflict-afflicted areas, and particularly in the rural mountainous interior, have received almost no development aid from government, NGOs or international donors while the conflict has raged. The improvement in security that the peace process, if successful, will bring, provides new opportunities for reaching some of the poorest people in Aceh.

If the peace agreement holds, the "vertical conflict" between GAM and the government is likely to transform into one involving a horizontal scramble for resources and revenue streams, underpinned by widespread violent criminality. Addressing these issues requires the use of frameworks that take into account the multiple layers of conflict in Aceh, as well as a focus on longer-term institution and peace-building.

ⁱ The note is based on the report of the same title prepared by Patrick Barron, Samuel Clark and Muslahuddin Daud of the World Bank's Jakarta Office. The ideas and views are those of the authors. The full report is available on-line at www.conflictanddevelopment.org.

ⁱⁱ KDP (Kecamatan Development Program) is a billion dollar Bank/GoI community development program which has operated in over 28,000 villages (40% of the total) in Indonesia since 1998.

ⁱⁱⁱ SPADA (Support for Poor and Disadvantaged Areas) is a Bank/GoI project scheduled to become operational in early 2006, covering 42 districts in nine provinces in Indonesia, including Aceh.

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This Note was also published as Social Development Note No. 101 and is part of a series intending to disseminate good practice and key findings on conflict prevention and reconstruction. This series is edited by the CPR Unit in the Social Development Department of the Environmentally and Socially Sustainable Development Network of the World Bank. CPR Dissemination Notes are distributed widely to Bank staff and are available on the CPR website <http://www.worldbank.org/conflict> and can also be requested via e-mail at cpr@worldbank.org