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Book Review of, Patrick Daly, R. Michael Feener, and Anthony
Reid, editors. *From the Ground Up: Perspectives on Post-Tsunami and
Post-Conflict Aceh*

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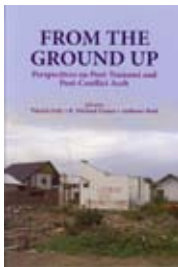
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Indonesia



Patrick Daly, R. Michael Feener, and Anthony S. J. Reid, eds., *From the Ground Up: Perspectives on Post-Tsunami and Post-Conflict Aceh*

Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2012. xxxi + 262 pages. Index, notes, glossary, and abbreviation. Softcover, \$32.90. ISBN: 978-981-4345-19-4.

THIS BOOK provides a valuable, all-encompassing approach to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami that devastated Aceh and the 2005 Helsinki Peace Accords that ended the region's decades-long conflict with Indonesia. The individual chapters are uniformly of high quality and strikingly multi-disciplinary, with contributions from Acehnese, Indonesian, and international specialists in geology, geography, development and international aid, economics, history, political science, law, international relations, conflict resolution, policy studies, security studies, and disaster studies. Academics and practitioners will find the volume valuable for its well rounded assessment of Aceh's dual disasters and the lessons it offers for other catastrophes and conflicts.

From the Ground Up begins with a geological explanation by Kerry Sieh of plate tectonics and the subduction zone near Sumatra that caused the earthquake and tsunami in 2004. Sieh presents historical data on past quakes and tsunamis and speculates on the timing and magnitude of inevitable future events of the same sort. He notes that geological data contribute to "public education, emergency

response preparedness and infrastructural resilience” (20) that can proactively protect people who live in vulnerable areas.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 deal with the humanitarian response to the tsunami disaster. Drawing on his experience with the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition, John Telford reflects on shortcomings of international organizations that handled tsunami relief and recovery operations. He notes in particular the lack of participation by and communication with the affected population, as well as fragmentation and lack of coordination between donor agencies. Considering the Links between Relief, Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD) in the context of the tsunami, Ian Christoplos and Treena Wu examine interaction between humanitarian relief and the chronic poverty that dampens resilience. They urge aid organizations toward greater engagement with existing local and national institutions and their development initiatives. Patrick Daly and Yenny Rahmayati provocatively challenge the “Build Back Better” doctrine. Who defines what is “better”? Do changes implemented by aid programs necessarily enhance local versions of acceptable recovery? They see “reconnecting with the cultural past” (59) as a preferable goal because it lines up with disaster survivors’ existing response mechanisms. Of these three chapters, the final one is most grounded in Acehnese realities, while the others provide helpful conceptual frameworks.

In Chapter 5, World Bank economists Wolfgang Fengler, Ahya Ihsan, and Kai Kaiser assess the challenges and strategies associated with managing large-scale flows of funding for relief and recovery in the aftermath of natural disasters and civil conflicts. They note the importance of rapid and flexible funding, good management, and reliable evaluation and monitoring (104–105).

Chapters 6 and 7 explore ethnographically how the tsunami affected people on the ground. Daniel Fitzpatrick examines property rights and how the Acehnese resolved land claims using overlapping and sometimes contradictory systems of custom (*adat*), Muslim law (*Syariah*), and national law. Despite safeguards containing explicit language to protect women and children, the vulnerable often lost access to property. Saiful Mahdi explores how tsunami survivors used village networks (*gampong* connections) of kinship and friendship to weather the initial shock of the disaster. Aid distribution in some cases undermined these strategies and structures, in the process weakening pre-tsunami forms of village leadership and conflict resolution.

In Chapter 8, geographers Rodolphe De Koninck, Stéphane Bernard, and Marc Girard take a historical look at Aceh’s forest resources, documenting the decline in forest cover and the role of agricultural expansion (palm oil plantations) and logging (for timber and paper products) in the acceleration of deforestation in Sumatra. They urge a systematic discussion of land use and monitoring to stem the destruction.

The final four chapters of *From the Ground Up* deal with the resolution of Aceh’s long-standing armed conflict between the Government of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM). Michael Morfit provides a vivid and detailed analysis of the negotiated settlement, focusing on the role of key government actors in crafting the Helsinki Accords and guiding the subsequent peace process. Morfit ex-

plicitly contests the assumption that the tsunami influenced events substantially; instead, he argues that foundational elements of the peace predated the disaster.

Morfit's chapter provides rich background for the three shorter chapters that follow. Pieter Feith reflects on the role of the European Union's Aceh Monitoring Mission that oversaw the implementation of the Accords. Leena Avonius considers the unfolding of the Helsinki Accords' justice elements, including an amnesty for GAM combatants (which has worked well) and the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Committee and a Human Rights Court (which have been disappointingly watered down or deferred). Rizal Sukma examines the elements of the Helsinki Accord that have allowed the peace to hold. Sukma argues that the suffering caused by the natural disaster made it "politically incorrect" to oppose any peace attempts through negotiation" (255), but that the distribution of relief and reconstruction funds to tsunami survivors created new tensions in Acehnese society, particularly among conflict survivors and other poor people. A lasting peace will depend on economic development for all.

The editors have crafted a dynamic go-to book for people specifically interested in Aceh and also in disaster management. The volume successfully presents multiple perspectives on the post-tsunami and post-conflict situation. Readers may find that the black-and-white format reduces readability of figures and maps in the natural science chapters, and that the analysis of the conflict ends in 2009, leaving one to wonder what has happened since then. Most of the chapters individually do not integrate discussion of the tsunami and the conflict, but the volume as a whole amply accomplishes this goal. In addition, the Acehnese situation provides a valuable touchstone for thinking about general processes in disaster preparedness, humanitarian aid, and conflict resolution.

Practitioners and academics will find the book enlightening, not least for the conversations it sparks between those two realms of expertise. In the classroom, the book could be used in courses about disaster, conflict, and humanitarian interventions or in area studies courses about Southeast Asia.

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