



Lessons learned from a locally-led emergency response

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Cover image: Volunteers from Palang Merah Indonesia (PMI), Indonesia's Red Cross Society, were active local responders to earthquakes that killed more than 2700 people in 2018. Credit: Caroline Haga / IFRC

INTRODUCTION

This report focuses on the localisation agenda¹ and how it can be used to strengthen disaster response and preparedness activities within the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement, and among other humanitarian actors.

It draws on a real time evaluation undertaken by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), Australian Red Cross and Indonesian Red Cross (locally known as Palang Merah Indonesia, or PMI for short), in December 2018.

Overall, the evaluation provides a positive example of a nationally-led and locally-managed emergency response, noting there is always room for improvement for future responses.

BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY

Nine significant earthquakes hit Indonesia during 2018. The most damaging earthquakes occurred on Lombok Island and in Central Sulawesi. Between July 29 and August 19, 2018, earthquakes in Lombok killed 515 people, destroyed or damaged 88,000 houses and affected about 500,000 people.

On September 28, 2018, a magnitude 7.5 quake struck the island of Sulawesi, triggering a tsunami with waves up to 6m high and ground liquefaction. More than 2,200 people were killed, almost 68,000 houses destroyed or damaged and more than 430,000 people were affected.

The Indonesian Government did not request international assistance. Instead specific support was welcomed through government-determined channels and offers of assistance from international donors and international non-government organisations (INGOs) were considered in order to fill identified gaps in the response. As a result of this position, the operation provides a positive example of a localised response, from which lessons can be distilled for use in future disaster preparedness and responses. Of particular note are the following points:

- PMI responded at scale from the onset (pursuant to its auxiliary role²), quickly mobilising capacity from its strong network.
- The Indonesian Government gave PMI additional responsibilities (i.e. in logistics, INGO coordination and camp management), which required coordination across a range of national and international stakeholders. While this raised PMI's image as a central response actor, it also heightened expectations of international humanitarian stakeholders for effective facilitation. These additional responsibilities were challenging for PMI and imposed a significant burden on them and on IFRC.
- PMI successfully worked with the Indonesian Government to launch an international appeal for the Lombok response through IFRC (later-on expanding the scope of the appeal intent to Sulawesi).
- International Red Cross Red Crescent capacities complemented the capacity of PMI in different ways in Lombok and Sulawesi, underlining the need for case-by-case decisions to ensure the right support is in place to complement the capacity of national actors.
- IFRC staff identified pragmatic solutions in order to shift its surge efforts to focus on support roles and operational coordination.

1. Localisation refers to investment in the long-term institutional capacities of local actors, the promotion of more equal partnerships, and better integration with local coordination mechanisms and was agreed to as part of the Grand Bargain at the World Humanitarian Summit.

2. This auxiliary role can be described as "a specific and distinctive partnership, entailing mutual responsibilities and benefits, based on international and national laws, in which the national public authorities and the National Society agree on the areas in which the National Society supplements or substitutes public humanitarian services[.]" Resolution 2, 30th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (2007). PMI is auxiliary to the Indonesian Government for disaster management and blood donations.



With more than 156,000 homes and properties destroyed following two earthquakes in 2018, local Red Cross volunteers were important to deliver the necessary on-the-ground work. Credit: Rosemarie North / IFRC

1. Walking the talk of a locally-led response

This was a locally-led response with limited international assistance requested. Although, the Indonesian Government did ask ASEAN member states to provide some targeted assistance.

This approach required a fundamental shift in international practices and proved challenging for many actors.

The Indonesian Government's approach to the disasters was to:

- harness local capacity where possible;
- issue clear guidelines for foreign aid workers asking they conduct activities with local partners and be registered with government agencies;
- request non-government organisations work through either BNPB (Indonesia's National Disaster Management Authority) or PMI, including for cash programming; and
- accept offers of international assistance fit for purpose, specific and intended to support and fill the gaps the Indonesian Government (and affected communities) most needed.

The Indonesian Government's strong stance for a nationally-led response caught many in the international community (donors, humanitarian organisations and media) off guard. The critics of this approach failed to read the signals and had not kept pace with groundwork the Indonesian Government and other stakeholders had done over the past decade to take the reins. PMI and IFRC played a significant role in this, particularly in the development of the Disaster Management Act Law No. 24 of 2007 and related implementing regulations.

Generally, the ongoing Indonesian operation is a wake-up call for Red Cross Red Crescent, as well as the broader humanitarian community and donors, to translate and action the Grand Bargain commitments on localisation.



Lesson learned 1.1: Policy dialogue on localisation has not yet filtered through to the operational level among international aid actors.

Lesson learned 1.2: Continued efforts are required to highlight the importance of localisation, and to ensure the transition from policy to operations: 'walking the talk' among international aid actors.



PMI's Hady Prasetyo has created dozens of new maps to plot earthquake damage, affected households, and delivery of humanitarian aid in Lombok using open-data. Credit: Sydney Morton / IFRC

2. Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies delegating authority and responsibilities to provincial and branch levels

Much of PMI's planning and decision-making (as with the authorities) took place at headquarter level. At times, provincial and local branch levels felt they were largely overlooked. There were issues both ways:

- Branches were asked to implement final plans without an opportunity to input into their development and also did not have adequate decision-making powers or financial and human resources.
- Branches spoke of a 'habit of retaining authority at the national level', despite PMI regulations that gave branches authority.
- At headquarters, issues were raised regarding capacity gaps in leadership, implementation and accountability for both branches and at a provincial level.

Lesson learned 2: National Societies must take action to implement their decentralisation policies through building enhanced leadership capacities at provincial and local branch levels, developing clear Standard Operating Procedures and delegating responsibilities with necessary decision-making powers and resources.

3. Effective coordination at all levels: regional, national and local

Effective coordination saves energy, resources, time and, most importantly, lives. For these responses, the Indonesian Government invited ASEAN's Coordinating Centre to Humanitarian Assistance (AHA Centre) to facilitate international cooperation.

The real time evaluation indicated there were challenges in maintaining effective and efficient coordination with all actors.

Some of these reasons included:

- Limited capacity of Indonesian National Board for Disaster Management and Regional Disaster Management Agencies, particularly at the provincial levels.
- Lack of national civil-military standards and mutual understanding of ways of working between the military and other humanitarian actors.
- Limited capacity of PMI at the branch/provincial level to effectively co-ordinate in more complex forums and situations.
- Limited capacity of PMI to manage internal and external coordination particularly given its new roles (e.g. for logistics) attributed to it by the Indonesian Government.

In addition, there were gaps in the capacity of the AHA Centre to take on its expanded role. These included poor assessment data collection and analysis, untimely sharing of information, lack of frameworks to conduct adequate needs assessments, and limited capacity of logisticians to manage incoming international relief, especially regarding shipment management and documentation. The capacity of the AHA Centre should be addressed as soon as possible if it is to continue to play a greater role in supporting coordination and operations of disaster responses among ASEAN members.



Lesson learned 3.1: National Societies may need to assess and strengthen their internal and external coordination capacities.

Lesson learned 3.2: IFRC's partnership with ASEAN's regional disaster management structures is critical and can be strengthened to contribute to capacity development and to building stronger synergies between the AHA Centre, IFRC and National Societies of ASEAN member states.

Lesson learned 3.3: The Red Cross Red Crescent Movement should continue to ensure strong coordination mechanisms and readiness planning.



Red Cross volunteers distribute supplies to families affected by earthquake. PMI's strong volunteer network and volunteer expertise is crucial to Indonesia's emergency response. Credit: Sydney Morton / IFRC

4. Building capabilities at all levels

The strong networks and capabilities of National Society volunteers and staff are critical assets for a successful local response to disasters. The Indonesian operation identified the need to manage and further develop such capacities and for local actors to address the integration of cross-cutting issues (such as protection) into their operations.

4.1 Volunteer resources

PMI's strong volunteer network and volunteer expertise in health, WASH and relief were key strengths in the Indonesian response; in particular, its ability to mobilise resources immediately after a disaster.

Recruitment and training of new volunteers at the local level is now ongoing at PMI and a new volunteer management system is in development.

However, challenges persist to sustain the required volunteer resources for current operations. Questions remain regarding how much capacity is enough and how this can be sustained.

4.2 Operational capacities: finance and logistics

A National Society's logistics and finance capabilities must be able to work effectively to meet operational needs. The Indonesian response highlighted the need to increase the competency of PMI staff, especially at branch levels, to ensure they can work within accepted standards.

The Logistics Emergency Response Unit (ERU)³ proved to be fit-for-purpose, enabling the operation to minimise the impact of PMI's capacity gaps. For the first time, a procurement delegate was embedded in the ERU, helping to kick-start some local procurement processes. The ERU also helped to coordinate and sort the large amount of relief supplies directed to PMI.

PMI and IFRC underlined the need to develop these sectors further with the understanding there may be too much complexity in IFRC finance and logistics procedures.

Practical steps that could be considered include:

- Invest in developing financial and human resources with a focus on the provincial and local levels.
- Prioritise high-risk disaster areas by further decentralising warehousing to the district level for improved response timing.
- Develop capacity of logistics staff, ensuring compliance with existing guidance and practical training (focus on emergency procurement, warehousing, supplies standards and quality assurance at national, provincial and local level).



Lesson learned 4.1: National Societies are encouraged to explore solutions to sustain the required volunteer resources over lengthy operations with a focus on both the quantity and competencies required at different stages of the response.



- Identify, assess and map local, regional and national suppliers and markets to support logistics preparedness.



Lesson learned 4.2: National Societies should review and address any shortcomings in their finance and logistics systems and staff capabilities. The IFRC should also review its support to ensure it is adequate.

4.3 Operational capacities: cross-cutting issues

International stakeholders (both within the Movement and beyond) identified a need for greater focus on (multi-sectoral) needs assessments, information management, quality assurance, and cross-cutting issues such as community engagement and accountability (CEA) and protection, gender and inclusion (PGI). Such components will add value to localised responses and their international acceptance.

All actors stressed the need to invest in continued development of these capabilities at national and local levels, while at the same time highlighting increasing challenges to obtain international funding for long-term capacity development programs.



Lesson Learned 4.3: National Societies and governments should assess their ability to integrate emergency needs assessments, information management, quality assurance, CEA, and PGI into their operations.

Lesson Learned 4.4: There needs to be continued investment in disaster preparedness to further support development of these capabilities at the local level. Concerted advocacy will support mainstreaming these capacities into national humanitarian standards and government contingency planning.

3. An Emergency Response Unit (ERU) is an international standardised disaster relief unit established by the IFRC.



IFRC FACT team leader Andreas von Weissenberg and PMI head of disaster management Muhammad Hadi conduct an aerial assessment of earthquake-affected areas. Credit: Benjamin Suomela / Finnish Red Cross

5. Supporting a localised approach to surge capacities

The IFRC Secretariat adapted to the nationally-led operation, supporting PMI in delivering on its mandate as a key Indonesian responder to the disasters and refrained from taking on implementation roles.

IFRC staff on the ground and management in Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur demonstrated good practice in a localised response by:

- being flexible and using existing surge tools in a pragmatic way;
- shifting from implementation to support roles;
- ensuring delegates demonstrated the adequate soft competencies (such as attitudes, sensitivity to cultural context and humility) required for support roles; and,
- adopting a 'business continuity' approach, allowing for quick deployments of local and regional IFRC Secretariat personnel and replacing them in their line-function with staff from other IFRC offices or surge personnel.

Further practical steps could include:

- prioritising soft competencies and local language skills for surge delegates, and
- considering adding a humanitarian analyst profile to surge roles filled by the IFRC Secretariat.



Lesson learned 5: IFRC can do more to communicate how to optimise surge capacities to National Societies and to make IFRC support processes (finance, HR) reflect localised responses.



National Societies, like PMI, are integrating information management, mapping, needs assessment and other response and preparedness activity. Credit: Sydney Morton / IFRC

6. Building humanitarian diplomacy at regional, national and provincial levels

National Societies have both an auxiliary role to their public authorities and are high influential humanitarian organisations in their own countries. Therefore, they are well placed to persuade decision makers and opinion leaders to act, at all times, in the interests of vulnerable people, with full respect for fundamental humanitarian principles. To strengthen the localisation agenda, National Societies could further build their humanitarian diplomacy efforts, particularly before and during disaster responses.

The PMI approach to humanitarian diplomacy provides some useful lessons and good practice examples, given its active role in national disaster management working groups. PMI has also influenced the shape of Indonesia's disaster management architecture, supporting the development of adequate national frameworks. IFRC's support has also been crucial.

National Societies, with appropriate support from IFRC and ICRC, can undertake humanitarian diplomacy with their governments and other relevant actors such as ASEAN and the UN.

National Societies can promote efforts to integrate emergency needs assessments, information management, logistics, quality assurance, community engagement activities and protection, gender and inclusion approaches in government response and recovery planning. They can also facilitate initiatives to establish humanitarian standards and disaster management Standard Operating Procedures, translating governmental frameworks into practical procedures, coordination mechanisms, delegation of authority and adequate financing of roles entrusted by the government.



Lesson learned 6: National Societies and the IFRC are encouraged to build stronger humanitarian diplomacy activities with their governments and other relevant actors, with a focus on articulating roles and responsibilities of stakeholders and ensuring response efforts adhere to humanitarian standards.



PMI volunteers delivering tarpaulins and following the Sulawesi earthquake. Credit: Benjamin Suomela / Finnish Red Cross

7. IFRC support for localisation

The commitment to more localised humanitarian action is an integral component of IFRC's agenda and strategy and is anchored in the Seville Agreement and its Supplementary Measures.⁴

Over decades, National Societies have invested in developing capacities at community, branch and headquarter levels within their own territory, and in bilateral and multilateral cooperation with other National Societies, the IFRC Secretariat and the ICRC. IFRC demonstrated its commitment to localisation during the Indonesian response and continues to do so. In this context, PMI and other National Societies identified opportunities for IFRC to further support the localisation process.

Opportunity 1: Advocacy

Continuing to advocate within the IFRC Secretariat and to National Societies will be essential to highlight the importance of localisation and the implications for all Movement components. Advocacy should be honest and target both the benefits and risks to be addressed in moving to locally-led responses.

Opportunity 2: Targets and milestones

Developing a roadmap for localisation with specific targets and milestones to guide the process will be important and will provide a good basis for a Movement-wide approach, yet to be developed. This can sit alongside the work plan of the Localisation Work Stream, co-convened by IFRC with the Government of Switzerland.⁵

Opportunity 3: Simplification

Simplifying IFRC support systems and tools (finance, HR, logistics), which are complex and involve a high level of checks and balances. Increased viability and applicability requires simplified support processes that can work within locally owned processes. IFRC Secretariat logistics specialists are currently working to capitalise on lessons

learned from recent operations and make current policies and procedures more suitable to the localisation agenda.

Opportunity 4: Direct funding

Exploring options for direct funding to National Societies could be expanded. The IFRC's pooled disaster relief fund is a good example of localised funding and its scope (eligible activities) and scale (maximum funding).

Opportunity 5: Deployment personnel

Using surge personnel from National Societies in disaster prone countries for deployments (including trainee missions) would boost their response management capacity and increase their understanding of international operational mechanisms. It would also improve the National Societies' readiness to host international assistance, and strengthen the capacity of other National Societies in close proximity of disaster onsets.



Lesson learned 7: There are a number of practical actions that the IFRC can take to further drive localisation including: continuing to advocate for localisation; developing a roadmap for localisation; simplifying IFRC support systems and tools; exploring options for direct international funding to National Societies; and, prioritising training and deployment of surge personnel from disaster-prone areas.

4. The Seville Agreement of 1997 provides a framework for effective cooperation and partnership between members of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. It specifies which organisation within the Movement would take the lead in certain field operations.
5. The Localisation Workstream is one of 10 thematic work streams distilling 51 shared commitments under the Grand Bargain. Each work stream is co-convened by one donor government representative and one humanitarian agency, with members including governments, communities, Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies and local civil society.

GLOSSARY

AADMER	ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response
AHA Centre	ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance
APRO	Asia-Pacific Regional Office
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BNPB	Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Bencana (National Disaster Management Authority)
BOCA	Branch Organisational Capacity Assessment
BPBD	Badan Penanggulangan Bencana Daerah (Provincial / district disaster management authority)
CCST	Country Cluster Support Team
CEA	Community engagement and accountability
DREF	Disaster Relief Emergency Fund
EA	Emergency Appeal
EMT	Evaluation Management Team
EPoA	Emergency Plan of Action
ERAT	Emergency Response and Assessment Teams
ERU	Emergency Response Unit
HQ	Headquarters
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
NDRF	National Disaster Response Framework
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NS	National Society
OCAC	Organisational Capacity Assessment and Certification
PGI	Protection, Gender and Inclusion
PMI	Palang Merah Indonesia (Indonesian Red Cross Society)
PNS	Participating National Society
RCRC	Red Cross Red Crescent
RTE	Real-Time Evaluation
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
ToR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations



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