

Abstract

## **Comparative Study of Natural Disasters in India, Iran and Indonesia**

### **Investigator**

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### **Aims and objectives of the research**

The aims of this project are to undertake a comparative study of the aftermath of natural disasters and to examine the ways in which urban reconstruction is organised and influenced by a range of different types of non-governmental public action in different socio-cultural settings. There is a growing realisation that the United Nations' framework of relief, recovery and rehabilitation has many shortcomings for reconstruction after natural disasters. Addressing this problem, the project will add a substantial comparative dimension to research I have already undertaken on post-earthquake reconstruction in Gujarat, western India. It will also produce general insights into the social dynamics of post-disaster reconstruction. The additional investigations will take place in the earthquake-affected city of Bam in Iran and in Banda Aceh on the island of Sumatra, Indonesia. The overarching objective is to produce a comparative and ethnographic account of the effects of comparable natural disasters on the social and moral fabric of three urban areas of a similar size in different socio-cultural zones of Asia.

### **Key research questions/hypotheses and methods**

This project is empirical, critical, comparative and guided by the results of previous research undertaken by the investigator in Gujarat. Disaster and reconstruction in Bhuj, Bam and Banda Aceh share obvious similarities but in each case the influence of particular histories, governments, legal and constitutional systems, religious sympathies, patterns of leadership and culture, and prevailing patterns of non-governmental public conflict and cohesion are having marked consequences for the patterns of urban reconstruction. With this in mind, the central question of the research is to explore how different societies reproduce themselves (their spaces and organisations) through post-disaster reconstruction. The Gujarat section of the project is based on long-term ethnographic fieldwork. The findings of that research will form the basis for more directed questions over shorter periods of fieldwork in Indonesia and Iran. Such questions include: Why do post-disaster environments encourage the growth of non-governmental public action? What roles do non-governmental actors play in post-disaster forms of local governance? What effects does organised non-governmental public action have on the distribution of power and decision-making processes in urban reconstruction?

### **Relation to the programme**

This research contributes to the general objectives of Strand A of the programme (organisations and non-governmental public action). Comparative and empirical research will allow for the creation of new data sets and theoretically informed accounts and descriptions of the complex interplay of disaster, people, organisations

and reconstruction. The findings of the project will compliment research undertaken on other strands of the programme.

### **Relevance of this research to user groups**

The project will contribute to an understanding of non-governmental public action in post-disaster reconstruction, especially in regard to the impact on societal relationships and different political and social actors. This dimension is essential for the many organisations working in the fields of mitigation and disaster preparedness as well as for longer-term development work in communities traumatised by disasters and conflict.

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