



# Power Relationships, Trust and Community Resilience?

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Natural hazard response efforts are increasingly reliant on broadcast warnings by agencies. While these warning systems are constantly improved through adoption of research findings and use of emerging platforms such as social media, improvements in community preparedness appear slow. One way to improve uptake of DRR messages might be to tap into influential trust relationships that already exist in communities.

Disaster management agencies are in a difficult position. On the one hand there are increases in all of the processes threatening communities: increasing number, scale and cost of disasters.<sup>1</sup>

On the other agencies are obliged to 'do more' due to increasing community expectations.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, communities seem to be unable to retain 'lessons learned' from previous disasters.<sup>3,4</sup>

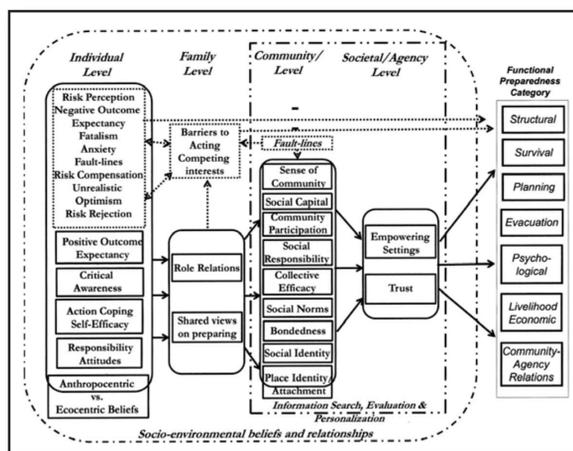


Figure 1: Influences on preparedness. After 5

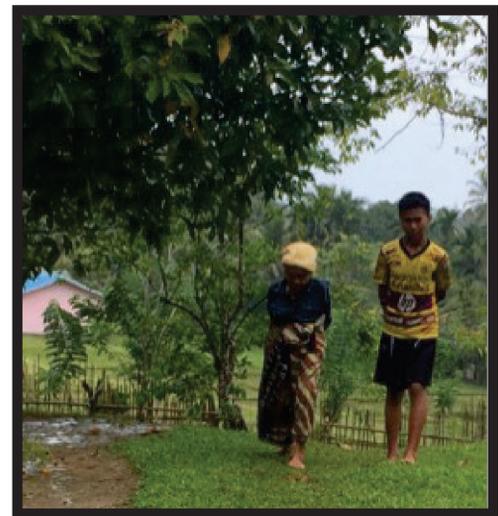


Figure 3: 'Soft Power' in Action: Ibu Rukiah, Simeulue's oldest resident, instructs her great great grandson who is named Smong after the tsunami that hit the day he was born.



Figure 1: Location of Simeulue Is.

## 100 YEAR OLD LESSONS FROM INDONESIA

The BNHCRC supported a PhD research project into the DRR of Simeulue Island in Indonesia. In 2004, the entire population of 80,000 survived the Indian Ocean tsunami. Extensive interviews were conducted with survivors to identify how people knew what to do.

### Curating local knowledge

Simeulue's success is due to maintenance of cultural traditions about a tsunami in 1907 that killed most of the island's inhabitants. Stories and songs informing risk perception were kept alive throughout the turmoil of the 20th Century.

## INFO FROM A TRUSTED SOURCE

The research in Simeulue found that highly respected grandmothers together with mothers formed a key axis in the maintenance of DRR. Consistent with research on influences of preparedness (above), not only was the information accurate, it was from a highly trusted source and empowered individuals and the community.

### Local Terms, local Influence

Simeulue has its own word for tsunami – "smong" – it is understood by everyone and old people stress the importance of knowing what to do at every opportunity. In a country where agencies and staff are viewed with circumspection (at best) the DRR message is spread by people otherwise overlooked by officialdom. They go about their business in villages and hamlets but the respect they have is enormous and this gives their DRR message an imprimatur of great power.

## CAN 'SOFT POWER' HELP?

The DRR 'strategy' of Simeulue is to embed the knowledge of smong 'under the radar'. Only after the lessons taught in family compounds saved the entire population from the 2004 tsunami did researchers and agencies express an interest in their story.

Through their interaction with children mothers and grandmothers exhibit a strong influence on the communities risk perceptions – 'soft power' that is so deeply trusted as to be habituated into an 'instinctive' response.

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