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Project Title: Cultural Drivers of Disaster Risk Reduction Behaviour

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This research aims to identify the cultural settings of Simeulue Island that a) maintained a tradition of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) behaviour and b) enabled an entire community to set aside normal cognitive biases and respond as one to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami leading to very low loss of life. Simeulue is a rare example where a whole community 'did the right thing' and avoided the disaster that killed 300,000 people, including their neighbours in Sumatra. Once the cultural drivers of the remarkable survival of the people of Simeulue have been identified, an examination will be made of ways to apply that knowledge in the Australian context. This includes potential for development of community resilience and risk communication programs.

During the last three months work on the refinement of the research question and the development of a project plan has progressed with consultation with stakeholders and end users as well as other researchers in the field. Consultation has also been undertaken with anthropologists and scientists who have worked on aspects of disaster recovery in Indonesia generally and Simeulue Island specifically.

This time has also been spent reviewing literature on DRR, the effectiveness of warnings, the value of agency risk communication, the development of community resilience, the importance of maintenance of traditional knowledge, the role of engagement with the natural context for disaster risk perception and the role of human cognitive biases in the failure to prepare for disasters. In addition, a focus on models for understanding community resilience and capacity building has helped to develop the research strategy which will be presented at the forthcoming Confirmation of Candidature seminar.

Finally, efforts have been made to develop contacts with Indonesian DRR through fellow research students and connections of the BNHCRC. Negotiations are underway to include a supervisor from the Institute of Technology Bandung in the project as a means of managing cross-cultural and communication issues.