

HOUSE DESIGN IN DISASTER AREA: Learning from Banda Aceh

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In December, 26th there were series of earthquakes, followed by a tsunami that hit several countries in Asia. The Province of Nangroe Aceh Darusalam in Indonesia had the highest casualties, with more than 150,000 people died and thousands buildings completely destroyed. The worst affected area was the Province's capital city, Banda Aceh, which is basically a settlement nearby an open ocean. There, tsunami's waves swept everything within 10 kilometres of the beach and stopped precisely at the Great Mosque in the heart of the city.

Rescues came in days afterwards from all over the world, including the US Navy 7th fleet's ships that were in the Gulf area. Besides basic needs of survival such as foods, medicines, blankets and clothes, there were many refugee camps being set up in the disaster area, consisting of variety types of shelters from the simplest tents to semi-permanent and permanent houses by many NGO's and Governments around the world.

It has been 2 years since the disaster happened and there are only small progresses being achieved. Roads and streets are cleaned up and already in use for normal transportation; schools, government offices and public facilities are re-opened, also commercial districts and markets, but most of the victims are still living in refugees' camps without any confirmation that they will soon go back to where they used to live.

Indonesian Government has just started to move on with a new comprehensive master-plan for the whole area within the Province, starting by the launching of new building codes. This alone is expected to create temporary halt to programmes of re-building, especially the provision of houses by Indonesian Government, private sectors and foreign NGOs. Many houses that have been designed according to technologies and prerequisites that comply with different building codes from the country of origin must be modified or re-designed, the result of which is undoubtedly a longer time of completion.

On the other hand, there is a fact that many houses that have been completed are still empty or unoccupied because the people do not want to live in it, either because the design does not fit to their way of life or the location is too far from their previous houses, or because the site planning broke the communality of their kinships.

This presentation is not able to show the whole of such cases due to reluctances of the victims to be open about what they really need, being the result of accumulated pessimism created after no significant progresses for the last 2 years.

Hence, only several examples of house design will be exposed. Recent survey held by the office of Indonesian Institute of Architects branch of Nangroe Aceh Darusalam Province showed that many of the design are simply a vehicle of experimenting inappropriate technologies, materials and wild ideas whereas houses that have been well appreciated by the victims are the most humble and local ones.

There is indeed some valuable knowledge to learn from what happened within the design of houses in Banda Aceh, the capital city of Nangroe Aceh Darusalam Province. The most important is, of course, not to play around with the victims' needs.