



# BEHIND THE BLUEPRINT: A LEARNING REPORT

## OCTOBER 2021

### INTRODUCTION

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**The Humanitarian Advisory Group (HAG) and Pujiono Centre research project *Building a Blueprint for Change* has put forward a vision of country-led humanitarian reform, drawing attention to the importance of interconnected and inclusive approaches to system change. Concentrating on Indonesia, it has been able to support connections between national and subnational conversations and has linked these to the discussions going on at a global level – elevating Indonesian voices into wider discussions and giving often abstract international reform debates an insight into processes and priorities within the country.**

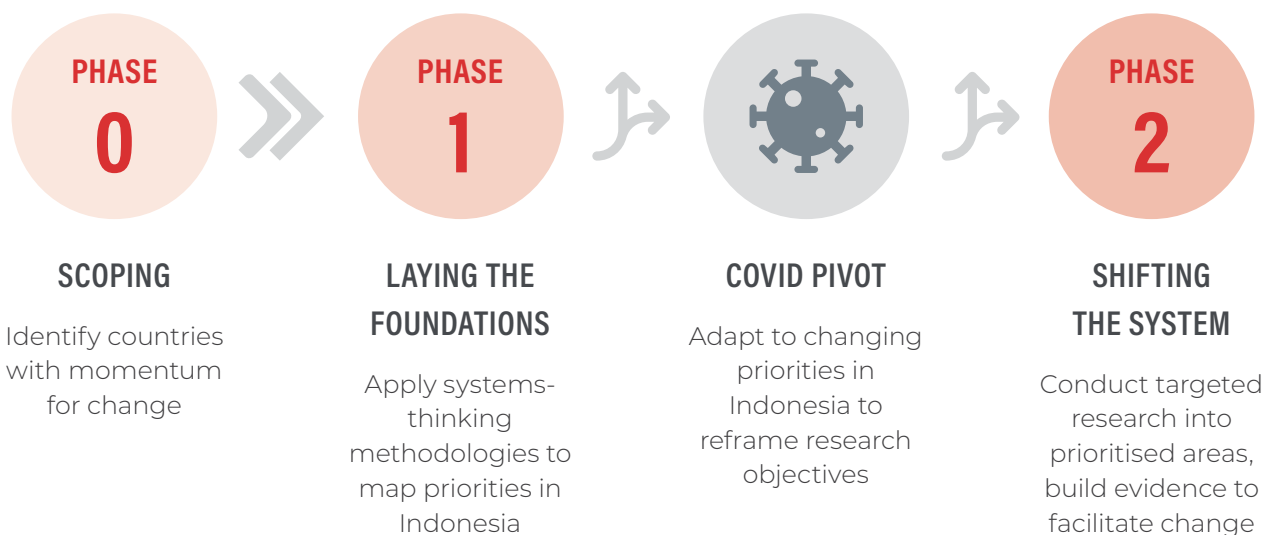
The COVID-19 pandemic came at a crucial phase in the Blueprint project. The impacts of the pandemic in Indonesia have been severe. Authorities and first responders have had to deal with the overlapping challenges of disaster response and pandemic control and resources have been stretched impossibly thin. Indonesian civil society organisations (CSOs) responded by convening various coordination networks, during which period the Blueprint project adapted to Pujiono Centre’s role in this regard, and later channelled related insights into the final stages of the research. This report reflects on how the project evolved and what we learned along the way, in hopes that learnings can be applied to future research and efforts towards country-led humanitarian reform in other contexts.

## ABOUT THE PROJECT

*Building a Blueprint for Change* is part of a multi-year program of research called [Humanitarian Horizons](#). The program adds unique value to humanitarian action in Asian and Pacific contexts by generating evidence-based research and creating conversation for change. It is funded by the Australian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and implemented by HAG in collaboration with partner organisations and researchers from the Asia-Pacific region.

The Blueprint research stream seeks to provide an evidence base to progress transformative change in the humanitarian system at the

country level, focusing on Indonesia. It investigates the conditions and drivers of reform, using historical perspectives and stakeholder engagement to plan for transformative and practical improvements to humanitarian action in the short term. As summarised in [Building A Blueprint for Change: Laying the Foundations](#) (2020), the project was designed to be conducted in three phases – (0) scoping, (1) building evidence for change and (2) proposing a plan to achieve it. In the end, with the disruption of COVID-19, the project unfolded in four stages. This report reflects on each of these in turn, highlighting what we learned along the way and the factors that enabled the project to adapt and continue.



## PHASE ZERO: SCOPING

### WHAT WE AIMED FOR

The scoping phase helped us identify Blueprint's focus country. The focus on a single country had the benefit of developing rich, grounded, contextually driven analysis. Because

the aim of the research was to identify avenues for change, the process of the research needed to generate buy-in and momentum for any action as a result. The people we worked with

and consulted as part of the research would have to be the ones to take it forward when we finished. It was important for key stakeholders to have enough exposure to and engagement with the project for its findings and recommendations to capture their priorities. We continue to believe that this depth of analysis is what is required for reform to have a chance of being effective and enduring.

## HOW IT EVOLVED

The in-country scoping process, looking at two contexts, was valuable in helping us identify the country with maximum opportunity for success. It provided the opportunity to directly consult with stakeholders and understand firsthand if there were conditions and momentum that the Blueprint research could support to progress reform at the country level. Consultations were held in the Pacific, specifically Fiji (June 2019), and in Indonesia (July 2019).

Scoping consultations in Indonesia found momentum for change following responses to the Sulawesi and Lombok earthquakes, a government calling for systemic change, strong interest in the research from a number of key stakeholders and alignment with timing of DFAT disaster management programming. These factors were identified as contributing to promising conditions for the research (see Box A). HAG and the Pujiono Centre did the consultations together, building on our collaboration on the Practice Paper [\*Charting the New Norm? Local Leadership in the First 100 Days of the Sulawesi Earthquake Response\*](#) (2018). Scoping in the Pacific was conducted in partnership with the Pacific Island Association of Non-Government Organisations (PIANGO) and found that the conditions were not as conducive to the Blueprint research.

### Box A: Findings of scoping consultations in Indonesia

- ▶ **Appetite:** Overwhelmingly, respondents were receptive to the idea of an open and participatory study where they could consider the changes in their environment against the objectives agreed during the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) and in Indonesia's own change agenda. Respondents stated their readiness to take part or contribute in the future study, while others recognised the potential of linking the research with their programs and milestones in the near future.
- ▶ **Need for the study:** Interviewees recognised the need for research of the proposed kind to support systemic changes in the humanitarian response system in the country. Humanitarian response is a major area of focus given the disaster profile of Indonesia, coupled with numerous changes to the system taking place, many of which are not coordinated or situated within a shared framework or change agenda.
- ▶ **Situating the research:** Many of the stakeholders in Indonesia were not aware of commitments made at the WHS in 2016. Some linked this lack of awareness to a lack of a mandatory country level reporting format, such as that under the Sendai Framework. Despite a low level of awareness of the WHS, Indonesian stakeholders still saw the need for transformative system change. Stakeholders confirmed there was no research or program underway in Indonesia currently looking at transformative change to the humanitarian system.
- ▶ **Proposed methods:** Instead of theoretical or hands-off research, respondents preferred an approach that was engaging, participatory and action focused. The respondents suggested that research findings interact directly with change processes, building a real-time evidence and allowing for iterative changes within the system.

Source: *Building a Blueprint for Change internal scoping report (2019)*

Discussions with broader project stakeholders helped to prioritise a methodology workshop to advance the initiative. This was held in Jakarta at the end of August 2019 – immediately following the Asia-Pacific Regional Conference held by the Grand Bargain Localisation Workstream.<sup>1</sup> The project capitalised on key stakeholders' presence in Jakarta. This was the first of a series of three workshops that structured phase 1.

## WHAT WE'D DO NEXT TIME

- ▶ **Invest in understanding potential settings for the research.** The time spent to gauge appetite for the research and seek input was very important in identifying the right conditions for the study.
- ▶ **Bring (potential) partners in from the beginning.** Doing the scoping consultations collaboratively ensured the process accessed valuable insights. It also meant that when the research began in earnest both partners had already explored the objectives of the research and had begun to consider opportunities and challenges in how to approach the study.

## PHASE 1: LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS

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### WHAT WE AIMED FOR

This phase of the project aimed to identify a lever for systems change at the country level through the application of systems thinking methodology. Systems thinking seeks to enable change in complex challenges by drawing out underlying patterns and identifying leverage points.<sup>2</sup> This project was the first time that HAG had used the systems thinking approach, requiring a significant investment of time but bringing new insights and adding to the skills base of the research team.

In this phase we also set up the Blueprint steering committee, which drew on operational, analytical, and donor expertise in Indonesia and the region. Throughout the project, the steering committee provided timely feedback on progress and opportunities for dissemination.

### HOW IT EVOLVED

Phase 1 used workshops to explore the potential for catalytic, systemic levers for change, as summarised in Figure 1. Regular stakeholder engagement was essential to adapt to their goals as these emerged from the process. The project's emphasis on developing practical contributions had the advantage of maintaining the focus on relevance and uptake of the research for stakeholders.

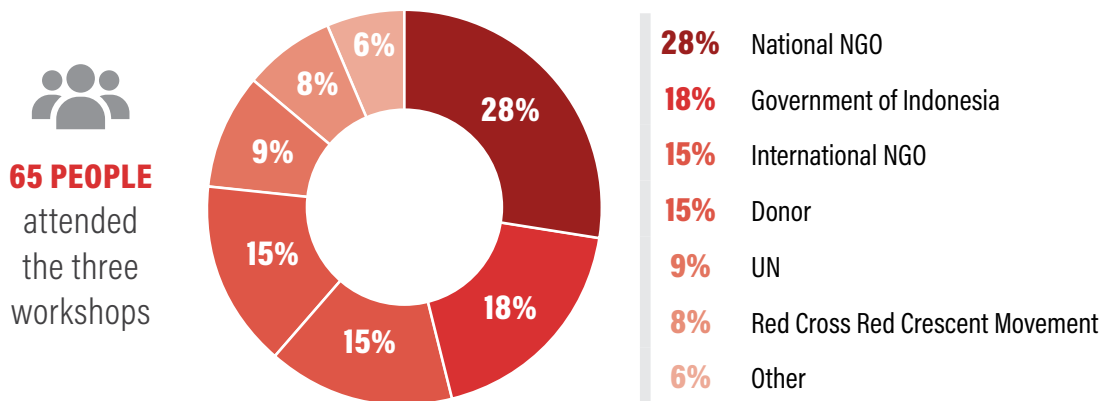
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<sup>1</sup> See <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/2020-01/Regional%20Localisation%20Conferences%20Summary%20Document%20-%20October%202019.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> The systems thinking methodology for this project was adapted from the Omidyar Group, Systems Practice Workbook. This approach was contextualised and validated through a partnership with CARl, and Indonesia-based data analytics organisation specialised in disaster management. For more information about the Omidyar approach, see: <https://docs.kumu.io/content/Workbook-012617.pdf>

Figure 1: Stakeholder workshops

	 Workshop 1	 Workshop 2	 Workshop 3
 <b>Omidyar Systems Approach</b>	LAUNCH	GAIN CLARITY	FIND LEVERAGE
 <b>When</b>	August 2019	December 2019	February 2020
 <b>Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Refine a research objective and outputs for Indonesia</li> <li>▶ Develop a research methodology for 2019–21</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Build a map of the humanitarian system in Indonesia</li> <li>▶ Capture key forces and patterns driving the system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Elicit feedback on the systems map</li> <li>▶ Identify potential leverage points within the system</li> </ul>



In phase 1, as in phase 2, there was strong engagement with civil society, Indonesian non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and international NGOs working in Indonesia. While some United Nations (UN) staff came to workshops, and we maintained engagement with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the

International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (IFRC), we did not integrate a global perspective in Phase 1. While not explicitly articulated in the design, this was perhaps inevitable given our methodology and partnerships, and constituted a distinctive feature of our approach.

By the end of phase 1, this process had identified four priority areas for change rather than a systemic lever:

#### THE FOUR PRIORITY AREAS FOR CHANGE:



**Coordination:** To refine and clarify roles and responsibilities and to ensure coordination is inclusive of all actors responding.



**Accountability:** To strengthen accountability to affected populations and all stakeholders.



**Capacity:** To strengthen and standardise capacity building as a priority for humanitarian resources in peacetime.



**Funding:** To improve access to and transparency of funding for national and local actors.

These were outlined in the report [Building a Blueprint for Change: Laying the Foundations](#) (2020).

We have high confidence in the validity of these findings for two reasons: firstly, that the four priority areas identified in the August 2019 discussion were affirmed in two further workshops and could not be combined despite substantial analysis and application of systems thinking. And secondly, that these findings aligned with similar findings emerging from the Center for Global Development's (CGD) separate and parallel [research project on humanitarian reform](#) at the global level. This unexpected result also indicates that results from the Blueprint for Change research may have applicability across other countries.

### Advantages and disadvantages of systems thinking methodology

The regular engagement facilitated a strong consensus amongst our key stakeholders on what needed to be strengthened in the humanitarian system in Indonesia to a) achieve transformative humanitarian system change

(in the language of the project's original design); and b) prepare for future crises and international responses in Indonesia where the government is likely to restrict direct international assistance and Indonesian actors will run the response. The process enabled stakeholders to contribute directly to the development of detailed analysis and findings through ongoing engagement with the same people, benefiting from firsthand experience where they could see jointly held views emerging. This can be considered part of the impact of the project (discussed further below).

However, although we applied additional analysis over three workshops, the two that focused on systems thinking methodology did not bring substantially different insights from the first workshop. While we were able to better understand and refine each of the four priority areas throughout the workshops, we didn't substantially progress our thinking during this time. One reason may be that we applied a very analytical, data-focused approach to systems thinking to what had initially been a more people-focused approach. The other reason may be that no matter what methodology we applied, there would always be multiple priorities that needed to be approached in tandem; while a second workshop was valuable for confirming and nuancing this finding, the third was likely unnecessary in that form and could instead have been used to progress the research towards action.

## WHAT WE'D DO NEXT TIME

- ▶ **Be more action oriented.** Using systems theory had the advantage of identifying, and reinforcing through detailed analysis, the four priority areas for reform. It gave us confidence in the validity of the findings. Nonetheless, too much time may have been spent in data exploration and nuancing the findings, while more energy could have instead been used to progress the research towards action.

- ▶ **Be specific about what the project is aiming to contribute and how.** While the goals of the Blueprint project were clear, it may have been useful to be more explicit about its in-country determined approach from the beginning as that is where the strengths of the methodology lie. This would help users of the research to understand why this phase did not engage as

directly with global perspectives on humanitarian reform.

- ▶ **Create provisional communication and impact plans from the outset.** This would have maximised the benefit from stakeholder engagement and helped identify specific audiences and tailor research outputs as the project progressed.

## THE COVID PIVOT

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### WHAT WE AIMED FOR

This was not a part of the Blueprint plan. While Phase 1 of the research project was able to identify four priority reform areas with a high degree of confidence, the ambitious next phase of the research, which focused on identifying the evidence base to recommend practical actions for change in Indonesia, was unable to progress as it was entirely dependent on engagement with stakeholders in-country who were dealing with the impact of the crisis, both on behalf of Indonesia and as it affected their lives and those of families, friends and colleagues.

At this point, the project pivoted to support the Pujiono Centre in the establishment and, later, evaluation of the SEJAJAR initiative. The importance of this flexibility to the project's contribution in Indonesia at this time and ultimate success cannot be underestimated. Supporting SEJAJAR was instrumental not only in contributing strategically to the CSOs' roles in the pandemic response, but also in allowing the Blueprint project to have an intimate vantage point on the crucial processes.

### HOW IT EVOLVED

In early 2020, the draft next steps ready for consultation included considering options and building the evidence base for coordination structures and information management systems or products (including on financing) that we could realistically progress within the time available. The end goal for Phase 2, and the end of the *Blueprint for Change* research, was endorsed structures and systems, and an endorsed roadmap to action the changes identified by the research.

Although there had been plans in place for collaborative, in-person research during April 2020, the onset of the pandemic was followed by a long period of 'wait and see' as we considered how the research could be useful, if at all, during a pandemic while our stakeholders were busy responding. During this time, the Pujiono Centre helped set up SEJAJAR to assist with coordination of the COVID-19 response in Indonesia. The research team made the decision to strategically support CSOs responding to the pandemic without losing the momentum generated in phase 1.

## The SEJAJAR initiative

As the COVID-19 pandemic struck Indonesia, the need for a more inclusive, cross-sectoral coordination platform became apparent. To fill this gap, the Pujiono Centre, in collaboration with Oxfam Indonesia and the Muhammadiyah Disaster Management Center (MDMC), created a network called Sekretariat Jaringan-Antar-jaringan (translated as Network-of-Networks of Civil Society Organisations), abbreviated as SEJAJAR, which also means 'equal' in Bahasa (see Box B).

### Box B: SEJAJAR: a platform for communication and coordination

SEJAJAR was designed to specifically address the COVID-19 pandemic in Indonesia. It is comprised of 25 national organisational networks, bringing a total of at least 600 CSOs/NGOs from 34 provinces across Indonesia. Members view SEJAJAR as a 'meta-network': a network of networks of CSOs/NGOs, including the Indonesian Red Cross, which serves as a multi-sector and multi-issue platform.

SEJAJAR provided and facilitated services for CSOs/NGOs and communities by exchanging information; strengthening grassroots and CSOs/NGOs cooperation at national, provincial, and district/city levels; and supporting strategy development. SEJAJAR also aimed to strengthen cooperation with governments and other stakeholders to combat COVID-19. For example, capacity development through SEJAJAR at provincial level included trainings for village facilitators and local officials in East Nusa Tenggara and West Sumatra.

The cost of running SEJAJAR was based on the spirit of Gotong Royong, where every organisation contributes according to its capacity. Operational costs for the secretariat were co-managed by MDMC, Pujiono Centre and Oxfam. Staff costs were carried by organisations allocating work-days of existing staff members to SEJAJAR activities.

Analysis from the SEJAJAR experience was developed through an evaluation led by the Institute of Research Governance and Social Change (IRGSC) and captured, with support from HAG, in the summary [Learnings from the SEJAJAR initiative in Indonesia](#) (2021).<sup>3</sup> The evaluation found that SEJAJAR provided a unique value to the crisis response by providing a whole of society approach and laid the foundation of a 'new normal' of CSOs' humanitarian engagement in Indonesia. This was arguably the project's most direct example of action research, although its focus on one of the four priority areas (coordination) was not accompanied by equivalent reflections on the others. Having the responsiveness and flexibility to support the work of SEJAJAR during the pandemic enabled an important contribution to the humanitarian and public health communities in Indonesia.

## WHAT WE'D DO NEXT TIME

- ▶ **Maintain flexibility.** Even in a sector used to dealing with volatility, the arrival of a global pandemic that would immobilise domestic and international travel was not something that we had foreseen. The partnership-based research design (see Box C) meant that the team was in a good position to adapt, but this was only possible due to the expertise of the Pujiono Centre and the flexible approach of the Humanitarian Horizons research program as a whole. This was in turn allowed by the approach taken by DFAT as program donor.
- ▶ **Be generous with time frames where possible.** The multi-year time frame of the program created space to adjust to the demands of the pandemic as well as allowing in-depth research.

<sup>3</sup> Read the evaluation summary in Indonesian, here: [Ikhtisar Evaluasi SEJAJAR](#)



### Box C: Lessons from a partnership-based approach

This research would not have been possible without a strong partnership in Indonesia. The partnership between HAG and the Pujiono Centre developed over time to build on the strengths of both organisations. The design and methodology of the research were co-created, allowing both organisations to learn from each other and take joint ownership of the project.

HAG was able to bring a global and regional perspective to the research, while the experience and expertise of the Pujiono Centre was critical to contextualise the approach and ensure that findings would be relevant and appropriate. The network and connections of the Centre were also key to engaging with critical stakeholders, including local CSOs which would have otherwise been inaccessible.

Key success factors for the partnership have been trust, transparency, mutual accountability and flexibility. The engagement was formalised at the onset of the project and sustained through a long-

term institutional partnership. This fostered a mutually nurturing relationship, in which both organisations maintained equal footing in making decisions, planning, and executing research activities throughout the project. Open communication, transparency and respect built a strong trust between the organisations and allowed all members of the research team to propose new ideas and raise any concerns openly and freely. Additionally, both partners were mutually accountable to each other, providing support as equal contributors and holding each other accountable for agreed roles and responsibilities. Another critically important aspect of the partnership (and the project) has been the flexibility. The multi-year partnership agreement has allowed both organisations to support each other through changes in context and priorities, allowing the research to progress in difficult circumstances which may otherwise have made the project infeasible.

## PHASE 2: SHIFTING THE SYSTEM

### WHAT WE AIMED FOR

This phase aimed to conduct targeted research into prioritised areas and build evidence to facilitate change. It learned from the technique of participatory action research, which adapts to the independent goals of stakeholders leading the process to ensure that outcomes are relevant for end users. The process itself aimed to help stakeholders produce the impetus for humanitarian reform.

### HOW IT EVOLVED

The first output of this phase was the report *Shifting the System: The Journey Towards Humanitarian Reform in Indonesia* (2021).<sup>4</sup> Based on a detailed review of published literature, this report examined key events and turning points in the country's progression towards locally led disaster management and humanitarian action over the past 20 years. Researchers from HAG and Pujiono Centre worked collaboratively to gather resources in English and Bahasa Indonesia and external review helped to nuance the picture where information in the published record was limited.

<sup>4</sup> Read the report in Indonesian, here: [Pergeseran Sistem: Perjalanan menuju reformasi kemanusiaan di Indonesia](#)

Beyond the literature review, data collection in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic continued to be challenging but also showed ongoing appetite for reform in Indonesia. Both partners conducted interviews remotely, which allowed us to reach more key informants, although we struggled to increase uptake of a separate online survey. The Pujiono Centre held a focus group discussion to reflect on the January 2021 earthquake response in West Sulawesi, when the pandemic was having a significant impact on the region and the country at large. Through collaborations with the Center for Global Development, members of the research team were also able to facilitate and contribute to a [by-invitation roundtable](#) as well as [public debates](#) about humanitarian reform in the region. The research was also able to support local and national actors to develop [reform briefs in each of the four priority areas](#) to share their views on what needs to change. This range of data and dialogues validated the project's proposition about the new approach needed for humanitarian reform (see Box D). The findings of this phase are presented in the final research report [Undervalued and Underutilised: Non-humanitarian actors in humanitarian reform in Indonesia](#).

### **Box D: Changing the frame for humanitarian reform**

The research and discussions in phase 2 highlighted very clear messages about turning the logic of the Grand Bargain 'upside down' so that the perspectives of national systems and actors are the drivers of reform. In Indonesia especially, this means systems that can respond effectively to the day-to-day crises: while they rarely make the international agenda, the frequent, smaller emergencies are extremely important in the lives of affected communities. The research suggested that more effective and inclusive systems at this level will also enable local and national actors to better respond to and lead responses to larger crises.

Along the way, the research supported conversations about reform with civil

society that otherwise wouldn't have happened, providing the opportunity, reflective space, and purpose for civil society to discuss and contribute to reform conversations. It also provided the platform to communicate civil society messages on reform to international actors implementing humanitarian reform at the global level. Elevating and listening to these voices is essential if there is to be constructive, locally directed change to how humanitarian responses serve the priorities of affected communities.

***"Let's seize the opportunity. Stop tinkering with the system. Let's make radical change."*** Puji Pujiono during [CGD and HAG panel on humanitarian reform](#)

Despite the advantages of the country leadership lens of the project and the sustained dialogues it supported, conducting a multi-year project within a single country created the risk of oversaturation during the research process. The mix of data collection methods placed significant demands on the time of certain contributors, especially when consultations overlapped with disaster response periods and public health responses during the COVID-19 pandemic. The desire to maintain continuity in these discussions – aiming to create buy-in by developing a cohort of people with influence and investment in the project – also potentially limited the diversity of views that the research was capturing.

Conversely, the project's engagement with the Government of Indonesia was not as strong in this phase. Representatives of government supported the project in phase 1 by opening workshops and contributing throughout. But in phase 2 this dialogue slowed down due to the nature of the research as well as the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Developing a piece earlier in the project on government views on humanitarian reform could have helped sustain more conversation, provided an advocacy tool, and supported the impact of the main research findings – though some reduction in engagement due to the pandemic was inevitable.

## WHAT WE'D DO NEXT TIME

- ▶ **Ensure that the methods of data collection and gathering are the right fit not just for the research questions but for the potential participants.**

For some people the amount of time required to engage with the project became an obstacle, especially given the pandemic context, although this was also a factor in phase 1.

- ▶ **Map out a vision and structure for stakeholder engagement.** A more detailed stakeholder engagement plan, developed early in the project, may have identified some of the issues that arose in relation to engaging with government. The plan could be revisited each quarter to assess progress and where greater or more tailored engagement is needed. But also...

- ▶ **Stay open to new opportunities.** The chance to contribute to different conversations with a range of audiences in Indonesia, regionally, and internationally, allowed team members to raise awareness of the Blueprint project.

- ▶ **Follow the findings, not the original theory.** Even though phase 1 was unable to identify catalytic levers for transformative change, phase 2 nonetheless revealed that certain characteristics of humanitarian action in Indonesia were essential to consider in any reform processes. This highlighted the importance of not starting out with pre-conceived ideas about who 'humanitarian' actors are and who should therefore be included in efforts to strengthen coordination, share capacity, improve accountability to affected people, and influence responses to crises at different scales. While this is not a 'lever,' our research suggests that it must be part of any blueprint for humanitarian reform in Indonesia and potentially elsewhere.

### About the research partners

#### About Humanitarian Advisory Group

Humanitarian Advisory Group (HAG) was founded in 2012 to elevate the profile of humanitarian action in Asia and the Pacific. Set up as a social enterprise, HAG provides a unique space for thinking, research, technical advice and training that can positively contribute to excellence in humanitarian practice.

#### About Pujiono Centre

Pujiono Centre's mission is to build effective multidisciplinary and intersectional knowledge by expanding the capacities of practitioners and learners via innovation, tools and services. The Pujiono Centre promotes evidence-based policymaking in disaster management and climate risk reduction through the provision of credible information.

#### About CARI

CARI (Cerdas Antisipasi Risiko Bencana) is an Indonesia-based data analytics organisation specialised in disaster management. CARI has created databases, search engines and dashboards to facilitate access to knowledge about humanitarian and disaster response in Indonesia, including COVID-19. CARI supported HAG and Pujiono Centre in the systems mapping and methodology in phase 1.

For more information about this research, please contact Jesse McCommon at [jmcccommon@hag.org.au](mailto:jmcccommon@hag.org.au); or Puji Pujiono at [puji@pujionocentre.org](mailto:puji@pujionocentre.org)

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