

# The Situation of Local Iranian NGOs and their Role in the Recovery and the Reconstruction of Bam

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## Abstract

A catastrophic earthquake occurred in the city of Bam and its surrounding areas on December 26, 2003. In response to the calamity, international NGOs from all over the world conducted extensive emergency assistance activities, fulfilling a crucial role during the emergency. After this emergency period the international NGOs conducted their activities and left the affected area. However, long-term assistance is essential for the recovery and the reconstruction of Bam, and will be handled by local Iranian NGOs. Hence, the authors made 2 visits to Iran to investigate local Iranian NGOs. The authors visited about 10 local NGOs in Tehran, Kerman, and Bam, as well as a small number of international NGOs. The present study introduces some examples of how international and local NGOs responded to the Bam earthquake and the general situation of the local Iranian NGOs including efforts, difficulties, and challenges. Overcoming these difficulties, empowering local NGOs, and establishing a good cooperative relationship between international and local NGOs would strengthen and support long-term activities, which in turn would be the key to the recovery and the reconstruction of Bam.

**Key words:** local NGO, international NGO, disaster relief, Bam earthquake

## 1. Introduction

At 1 : 56 GMT (5 : 26 A.M. local time), on December 26, 2003, an earthquake of  $M_w=6.5$  occurred in the city of Bam and its surrounding areas, in the province of Kerman in southeastern Iran. The death toll was initially reported to be more than 40,000. (On March 29, the Iranian authorities lowered the death toll to 26,271.) The population of Bam and its surroundings was estimated to be about 120,000. This means that one third of the population was killed by the earthquake. 80% of the buildings were destroyed in the city, including 80% of the historical heritage site of Arg-e Bam (meaning Citadel of Bam in Farsi). The magnitude of the Bam earthquake was not extremely large, but the reason for the unprecedented damage was that the hypocenter was shallow, and most of the houses were built with sun-dried mud bricks (adobe) according to the traditional building methods of the area.

Upon hearing of the devastation, emergency as-

sistance from all over the world poured into Bam immediately after the disaster. The authors also visited Iran one month after the earthquake in the name of Message from Kobe, a unit comprising 2 NPOs in Kobe, Citizens towards Overseas Disaster (CODE) and Nippon Volunteer Network Active in Disaster (NVNAD), in cooperation with Research Center for Civil Society, Graduate School of Human Sciences, Osaka University (Atsumi and Okano, 2005). The team was organized to assess the situation in Bam, and to consider what Kobe, where the 1995 Kobe earthquake struck, could do. The main objective was to support the local Iranian NGOs because (1) Message from Kobe is also a combination of small organizations, and (2) it would be the local Iranian NGOs that would play an essential role after the emergency period. Hence, the authors visited about 10 local NGOs in Tehran, Kerman and Bam and conducted interviews regarding their activities, present situation, needs, etc. Based on the first visit, a second

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visit to Iran was made to launch practical research. As a result of these visits, the present study reports the situation of local Iranian NGOs, introducing some examples of how they operated in response to the Bam earthquake and the role international and local NGOs will play in the recovery and the reconstruction of Bam.

## 2. Outline of research in Iran

During the 2 stays in Iran, we visited several international and local NGOs in Tehran, Kerman, and Bam, and held meetings and interviews to collect information concerning the Bam earthquake, the needs of people and local NGOs, and the situation of the relief operation. The meetings and interviews were held as follows. Descriptions of specific NGOs follow.

The first visit to Iran took place from Jan. 25 to Feb. 5, 2004. The objective was a preliminary research to collect information about the needs of local NGOs, and to offer support. On Jan. 26, we had a joint meeting with several local NGOs and individuals in Tehran. Although most were working with children suffering from cancer, environmental issues, street children, journalism, and engineering, and not disaster relief, some went to Bam immediately after the earthquake as volunteers. As the result of the Bam earthquake, it was found that a disaster management system had not been established in Iran. We were asked to demonstrate the system adopted in Japan and share the lessons learned from the earthquake in Kobe. On Jan. 27, a meeting was held with Hamyaran Iran NGO Resource Center and information was received about the situation of local NGOs. On Jan. 28 a meeting was held with a youth organization. It had established a new network for the Bam earthquake and wanted to learn about preparedness gained from the Kobe experience. On Jan. 29, we left Tehran for Kerman and a meeting was held with Kerman NGOs House and the joint team of Technisches Hilfswerk (THW) and Malteser. THW is the General Federal Agency for Technical Relief in Germany, and Malteser is a German emergency service. Subsequently, we left Kerman for Bam. In Bam we visited 2 tents of local NGOs; Chakavak (meaning Skylark in Farsi) and Nobavaran Bam. The former cares for children through music and the latter is involved in cultural activities. On Jan. 30, a meeting was held by 3

Japanese NGOs—World Vision Japan, Peace Winds Japan, and Nippon International Cooperation for Community Development (NICCO)—which participated in Japan Platform. We shared relief operation information. On Jan. 31, we left Bam for Kerman to attend a meeting with international and local NGOs held by Kerman NGOs House. On Feb. 1, we left Kerman for Tehran. On Feb. 3, a workshop was held for members of a youth organization. We reported on the conditions seen in Bam, and shared our experiences from Kobe. On Feb. 4, we left Tehran for Japan.

The second visit to Iran was took place from Feb. 26 to Mar. 4, 2004. The objective was to begin practical research based on the first visit. A member from CODE also accompanied the authors at this time. On Feb. 27, a meeting was held with YARA and Association for Protecting Child Laborers (APCL). On Feb. 28, we left Tehran for Kerman, had a meeting with Kerman NGOs House, and then went to Bam. We met with other Japanese who were in Bam (JICA, Pacific Consultants International (PCI), Disaster Reduction and Human Renovation Institute (DRI), Peace Winds Japan, and JEN), and shared information and details of activities. On Feb. 29, we visited APCL in Bam and discussed a program to exchange of drawings made by children in Japan and Bam. We also had a meeting with Mehrazan Javan, a new NGO established by young architects. On Mar. 1, we visited Mashiz (Orphanage Charity Institute) and were informed about the situation of orphans after the earthquake. We visited Nobavaran Bam again. On Mar. 2 we left Bam for Kerman and visited Kerman NGOs House to report our activities, after which we left Kerman for Tehran.

## 3. Activities of NGOs

### 3-1. Activities of International NGOs

According to Kerman NGOs House and UNOCHA (United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs), within days of the earthquake, more than 80 international relief organizations arrived in Bam and NGOs from about 60 countries to provide in-kind and monetary contributions. A month after we first visited Bam, many international NGOs were still operating, although the emergency period had passed. Some examples of Japanese NGOs follow. They participate in Japan Platform, a

system that provides emergency relief during natural disasters and refugee situations more effectively and quickly through the cooperation and the equal partnership of NGOs, business organizations, and government, using such resources and characteristics to the full. It subsidized a total of 331,087,880 yen, including governmental and private funds (donation), to 9 Japanese NGOs working in Bam as of July; Basic Human Needs (BHN) Association, Humanitarian Medical Assistance (HuMA), JEN, NICCO, Peace Winds Japan, Save the Children Japan, Shanti Volunteer Association, World Vision Japan, and Japan Rescue Association. We interviewed the following 3 organizations.

○World Vision Japan

World Vision Japan is a privately funded, internationally active NGO based on Christian principles. It has national offices in more than 80 countries. World Vision Japan was established in 1987 in partnership with other World Vision offices all over the world. Its aim is to contribute to the realization of a society where people oppressed by poverty, hunger, and conflict can live with hope and dream of a better tomorrow. One of its main programs is the emergency relief and rehabilitation program.

It began relief operations in Bam on December 30, and made a rapid assessment of the damage. As a result, distribution of shoes (2 pairs for adults and 3 pairs for children) to 1,547 families and underwear (2 for women, 2 for men and 6 for children) to 2,557 families in need was undertaken. It also plans to provide 60 temporary classrooms. (As of mid-July, the project had almost been implemented.)

○Peace Winds Japan

Peace Winds Japan is an NGO established in 1996, and is dedicated to the support of people in distress, threatened by conflict, poverty, and other turmoil. Support activities include emergency humanitarian relief.

Relief operations began in Bam on December 27 and 10,000 liters of mineral water, 1,300 blankets and 1,000 heaters (all goods were bought locally) were brought to the affected area with the cooperation of Mercy Corps (NGO from the US). 500 tents from Pakistan for a camp were also provided. A sanitation kit (soap, towel, sanitary napkin, disposal diapers, detergent, toothbrush and toothpaste, comb, nail clippers etc) was also distributed. In 3 other districts,

underwear for 1,500 men and 1,500 women in need was provided. Temporary schools and a workshop on anti-earthquake reinforcement buildings were planned. (The projects have been implemented and reconstruction of a school and construction of anti-earthquake reinforcement model house are planned.)

It has experience working with Afghan refugees in Iran, which enabled it to quickly launch operations.

○NICCO

NICCO, an NGO providing relief and rehabilitation work since 1979, with the mission of promoting world peace through coexistence and co-prosperity with a global mind, supports local initiatives.

It has an office in Mashhad (northeast Iran), working on projects for Afghan refugees, and was the first Japanese NGO to reach Bam. Relief operations began in Bam on December 27 and 48 boilers and showers (24 for men and 24 for women) were installed in a camp, 78 carpets, 400 blankets, and a winter clothing kit (sweat-shirt, underwear, socks, etc.) were distributed to 425 families, and a total of 718 kits of daily supplies (commodities, school supplies) were provided. Similar activities were implemented in other districts as needed. Sanitary services such as toilets for areas with a lack of supplies such as a camp for Afghan refugees and radio distribution and other projects are planned. (As of mid-July, the projects had been implemented.)

### **3-2. Activities of local Iranian NGOs**

#### **3-2-1. NGOs in Tehran**

○Association for Protecting Child Laborers

The Association for Protecting Child Laborers, headquarters is located in Tehran. Essentially, activities focus on educational assistance for Afghan refugees or Iranian street children. About 10 years ago, members began meeting, and about 4 years ago, it began offering classes on Fridays. Activities expanded as follows: (1) promotion of literacy, (2) support for children, (3) education on public health, (4) provision of health and medical services, (5) offering art classes (6) carrying out a study on mothers and children, (7) studying the rights of children. The main objective when teaching in tents is to provide a home environment where children do not need to work. There are 4 regular staff to care for about 400 children, with 30 members always present and 100 volunteers on hand.

The association itself is not related to disaster relief. However, following the 1990 Rudbar earthquake (Mw=7.4) happened in northwest Iran, a director began to consider the mental care of children. After the Bam earthquake, 18 people, including staff and volunteers, went to Bam and decided to dispatch a director to Bam for 6 months. (See 3-2-3)

○Hamyan Iran NGO Resource Center

Hamyan (meaning supporters in Farsi) is the first NGO resource center. It was organized in 2000 and registered in 2001. In 1998 the Consultation Workshop of Iranian NGOs, hosted by the Family Planning Council with the support of WHO, was held in Bushehr (southern Iran). About 50 participants discussed the role of NGOs and the need to strengthen that role, and the capacity and the effectiveness of NGOs in Iran. Hamyan was organized as a service organization dedicated solely to implementation of the Bushehr action plan and strives (1) to empower people, civil society, and NGOs through the promotion knowledge, skills, advocacy, and research; (2) to strengthen national and international cooperation; (3) to create an environment that is conducive to the activities of NGOs; and, (4) to create a community-based model, emphasizing sustainable development, protection of the environment, community participation, poverty alleviation, vulnerable groups, equality of citizen's rights especially of women and young people, compliance with the code of ethics of a civil society, especially transparency, accountability, and respect for human dignity. In 2001, Hamyan held the first NGO meeting (Bushehr +4; Challenges and Approaches) in Mashhad to review work accomplished after Bushehr.

Regarding the Bam earthquake, Hamyan undertook the role of coordinating information-collecting and sharing, because local NGOs were scattered around Iran without any coordination. Also, it helps Kerman NGOs House by holding workshops for local NGOs and coordinates local and international NGOs.

○YARA

YARA (meaning helpers in Farsi) is a new NGO organized after the Bam earthquake. The group members visited Bam after the earthquake as volunteers, but they could not do anything due to lack of management. After this experience, they decided to organize an NGO to alleviate the effects of the disas-

ter. Its 4 main objectives are: (1) planning to cope with natural disasters; (2) training (including self-rescue and training of volunteers) through workshops and seminars; (3) organizing a rescue team; and, (4) performing rescue operations when necessary. They requested disaster relief guidelines from our experience in Kobe and advice on training.

**3-2-2. NGOs in Kerman**

○Kerman NGOs House

Like Hamyan in Tehran, Kerman NGOs House is an umbrella association of more than 40 local relief agencies in Kerman. In 2002 a second NGO meeting was held in Kerman hosted by Hamyan and Kerman NGOs House. They emphasized the need to promote a more active and closer mutual relationship between NGOs and governmental organizations at several levels of society.

After the earthquake it became an information provider and the main coordinator between local Iranian and international NGOs, because it is located within the very province that was affected. According to its research, there are about 100 NGOs in Kerman Province; 11 for education, 3 for prevention, 10 for treatment, 33 for support, 3 for research, 9 for women, 7 for environment, 8 for rehabilitation, 9 for children, 2 for economic and 5 for handicrafts. A broad outline of recognized needs and proposed responses, as assessed by the local civil society within the affected area, was made.

○Mehrazan Javan

Mehrazan Javan (meaning young architects in Farsi) is an NGO organized by young architects, and is under the umbrella of Kerman NGOs House. Its objective is to build earthquake-proof permanent houses, but since work has only just begun, it is still unclear as how to proceed. First, distribution of a questionnaire to residences of 385 people in Bam is planned to assess needs.

**3-2-3. NGOs in Bam**

○Association for Protecting Child Laborers (See 3-2-1)

The Association for Protecting Child Laborers headquarters is located in Tehran. A director went to Bam and is teaching children in a tent (in containers as of July). Emphasis is placed on mental care for the children. English classes are held and a big tent was provided with support from Japanese NPOs, so the children could participate in play, sports, games,

and music therapy. This association became our main counterpart and we gave them drawings from Japanese primary school children. We also received drawings made after the earthquake from the children of Bam, and the drawings are now being exhibited in Kobe.

○Mashiz

Mashiz is an institution for orphans. The headquarters, located in Kerman, manages 10 orphanages throughout Kerman Province, and cares for about 450 children. The orphanage in Bam was completely destroyed by the earthquake. Of the 31 girls there prior to the earthquake, 19 died, and 1 is still missing. Those who survived were sent to the orphanage in Kerman. The children want to return to Bam, but there is no place for them now.

○Nobavaran Bam

Nobavaran Bam (meaning new belief in Farsi) is also an NGO under the umbrella of Kerman NGOs House. Its objective is to facilitate cultural events such as education, sports, and care for children. A temporary cultural center for such events and a place for people to gather has been built, however, activities have just recently begun, so no events have taken place yet. Materials such as books, computers, sports goods, audio equipment etc. are needed.

**4. Discussion**

**4-1. Roles of local and international NGOs in the stages of recovery and reconstruction**

As a result of the research, the authors found the international NGOs played an important role during the emergency period because they provided massive, effective, and prompt relief operations with skill and experience. However, most had left Bam by mid-April after 3 months of operations. The purpose of the Flash Appeal launched by the Iranian national authorities and the UN on Jan. 8, 2004, was to address relief, recovery, and immediate rehabilitation requirements in the Bam region for the following 90 days (about 3 months). However, long-term efforts after the conclusion of such emergency relief by international NGOs are naturally crucial for the reconstruction of Bam. The stages of the recovery and the reconstruction of Bam have just started and many challenges remain, such as recovery of industries, the re-propagation of date palms and reestablishing the Qanat (the traditional irrigation sys-

Table 1. The role of local and international NGOs at each stage. Disaster relief can be separated into 4 main stages. A double circle means more active than a circle.

	<b>Local NGOs</b>	<b>International NGOs</b>
<b>Preparedness</b>	◎	○
<b>Emergency Relief</b>	○	◎
<b>Recovery</b>	◎	○
<b>Reconstruction</b>	◎	○

tem in the region), building permanent houses, schools or hospitals, mental care for those in need. To carry out long-term assistance, the local Iranian NGOs must play an important role with the cooperation of international NGOs (See Table 1).

**4-2. Challenges in the future**

**4-2-1. Empowerment of local NGOs**

Humanitarian volunteer work in Iran has a long history. Volunteerism in Iran is related closely to its national values, traditions, culture, and religious beliefs and serving others is considered to be a sacred religious duty. So, it is natural that traditional community organizations have been created to cope with natural and man-made disasters, and with internal and external factors such as a limited water supply and a long history of despotic regimes (Namazi, 2000). In this environment, Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) have become active in Iran. However Iranian NGOs still face many difficulties. Although there was a need for CBOs and NGOs, the process of political change faces serious obstacles and hurdles (Namazi, 2000). However, on May 23, 1997, Hojjatolislam Mohammad Khatami was elected president with almost seventy percent of the total vote. He set a new tone in the government under the goals of the rule of law, establishment of a civil society, freedom of expression, and put considerable stress on strengthening the civil society as the key strategy for social, political, and economic progress (Sakurai, 2001). This new trend is encouraging a greater role for the civil society in general, and CBOs and NGOs in particular. Sakurai (2001) also points out, however, that the old establishment still has a strong influence, and opposes the progressive policies of the

president.

At the Bushehr conference, clarification of the obstacles that hinder the empowerment of NGOs and the problems they faced were discussed. Namazi (2000) mentions that one of the main obstacles is a legal barrier. The central body for registering NGOs in Iran is the Ministry of Interior. The procedure is the same as that for political parties, and can take several years to complete. Moreover, NGOs are not sufficiently informed about these complicated procedures. These factors discourage and dampen the spirit of volunteerism and a large number of NGOs are working unregistered or registered as non-profit companies with the Ministry of Justice as an alternative. Because they are not officially recognized, they face formidable obstacles. Furthermore, government control also influences the activities of the local NGOs.

Namazi (2000) also states that the multiplicity of the government decision-making centers lack coordination, with each following its own independent, disjointed policies. This creates many difficulties for NGOs and the exercising of heavy control restricts initiatives and creativity. Also, NGOs centered in Tehran, have overlooked the significant role of the traditional CBOs leading to insufficient affinity with the community. A shortage of professional skills, management system, and financial ability hinders the empowerment of local NGOs.

Now that the Iran NGO Initiative programs are proceeding to empower NGOs through legal reform, training, management, and capacity development, dialogues are underway among provincial and local NGOs and CBOs. As empowerment of NGOs continues, a greater role and increased presence of those local NGOs working in Bam will lead to long-term assistance.

## 5. Conclusion

Because Iran frequently has earthquakes, concepts of disaster management or preparedness are being developed. Regarding the 1990 Rudbar earthquake (Mw=7.4), the Ministry of Interior was assigned responsibility and authority for disaster management in 1991, and it is now assigned to the authorities of the city of Tehran. With support from UNDP, an Integrated Natural Disaster Management Plan (INDMP) was developed and approved by the

Cabinet in April 2003. However, the existing government and non-governmental bodies have focused mainly on relief and response, and little attention has been paid to disaster risk management (Kerman NGOs House, 2004).

According to research by Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), if a major earthquake were to occur in the future in Tehran, a worse-case scenario would put the death toll at 350,000 (JICA, 2000). The Bam earthquake showed the importance of local NGOs and their cooperation with international NGOs and governmental organizations. This experience and the lessons learned from the Bam earthquake, as well as the efforts and achievements of local Iranian NGOs, should be reflected in future disaster countermeasures in Iran.

More than 6 months have passed since the earthquake and more international NGOs are leaving Bam. The authors would like to keep attention on Bam and see how the international and local NGOs play their roles in the recovery and reconstruction period in the future.

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