

BOOK REVIEW

Islamic Civil Society Organizations and Their Role in Forming Social Capital in Disaster-Hit Communities in Southeast Asia: The Cases of Aceh and East Java, Indonesia

By Muhammad Riza Nurdin, Kyoto: Ritsumeikan University Asia-Japan Research Institute, 2023*

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I have the privilege of knowing Muhammad Riza Nurdin, a brilliant scholar with deep roots in Aceh, Indonesia. Given his Acehnese heritage, Riza was undoubtedly impacted by the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami (IOT), which has profoundly shaped his interest in disaster studies, particularly in the context of Islamic Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). This devastating disaster has inspired Riza's commitment to understanding and enhancing disaster recovery processes. His dedication to this field resonates deeply with me, as I share a similar background and scholarly focus on disaster studies.

Experiencing the 2004 IOT led me to grapple with numerous questions about the nature and frequency of such disasters, our communities' preparedness, and the historical knowledge — or lack thereof — about tsunamis in Aceh. These questions have driven my academic and personal interest in disaster studies, mirroring Riza's motivations and insights.

Riza's book, *Islamic Civil Society Organizations and Their Role in Forming Social Capital in Disaster-Hit Communities in Southeast Asia: The Cases of Aceh and East Java, Indonesia*, published by Ritsumeikan University as part of the Asia-Japan Research Series in 2023, offers an in-depth analysis of Islamic CSOs and their impact on social capital formation in disaster-hit communities in Aceh and East Java. When Riza handed me his book, I was incredibly excited to read it. As I expected, the book is filled with insightful analysis, reflecting Riza's exceptional skills in qualitative research, which he has expertly presented throughout his work.

The book is structured into several comprehensive chapters, each delving into unique aspects of Islamic CSOs and their role in disaster recovery. The Introduction sets the stage by providing an overview of the research focus and the importance of social capital in disaster-prone regions. "Chapter One: The Nexus between Civil Society, Religion, and Social Capital in Disaster

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Recovery,” explores the intricate relationships between these elements and their collective impact on resilience and recovery efforts. Chapter Two: “The Development of Indonesian CSOs: Various Roles and the Use of Social Capital,” examines the historical and contemporary roles of CSOs and how they utilize social capital. Chapter Three: “The Government and Gap Fillers in Indonesian Disaster Recovery,” highlights the interplay between government initiatives and CSOs, identifying areas where CSOs fill critical gaps in disaster response. Chapter Four: “Social Capital that Bridges, Bonds, and Links: Islamic CSOs in the Aftermath of the 2013 Gayo Earthquake,” focuses on how different forms of social capital (bonding, bridging, and linking) are mobilized by Islamic CSOs in the specific context of the Gayo earthquake. Chapter Five: “Positive and Negative Externalities of Social Capital: External Islamic CSOs in the Aftermath of the 2014 Mt. Kelud Eruption,” analyzes both the beneficial and adverse effects of social capital generated by external Islamic CSOs following the Mt. Kelud eruption. The Conclusion synthesizes the findings and provides recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of CSOs in disaster recovery.

This book’s flow and coherent structure guide the reader through a logical progression of ideas and case studies. Each chapter builds on the previous one, creating a layered understanding of the multifaceted roles of CSOs in disaster contexts. This structured approach not only aids in comprehension but also highlights the interconnectedness of social capital, civil society, and disaster recovery. The unique focus on different types of social capital — bonding, bridging, and linking — adds depth to the analysis and underscores the various ways CSOs contribute to community resilience. Riza’s meticulous attention to each case study’s historical and cultural contexts further enriches the narrative, making the book a comprehensive resource for scholars and practitioners.

Riza addresses three central questions: To what extent do external Islamic CSOs and other disaster management agencies contribute to disaster recovery in Indonesian communities affected by natural hazards? How do these CSOs create positive social capital or, conversely, cause negative consequences in these communities? What advantages do Islamic CSOs have in delivering disaster recovery aid to Muslim beneficiaries? Riza emphasizes Indonesia’s status as a disaster-prone country, highlighting the role of social capital in resilience and recovery. He identifies a gap in the literature concerning the role of external CSOs and focuses on civil society groups within disaster-affected societies. Riza’s study extends the existing literature on disasters in Indonesia beyond large-scale events like the 2004 IOT, including the 2013 Gayo Highlands earthquake and the 2014 Mt. Kelud volcanic eruption.

From my perspective, understanding the role of CSOs in disaster recovery is crucial. CSOs, particularly Islamic ones in Indonesia, often have deep-rooted connections within their communities, which can be pivotal in the aftermath of disasters. Their contributions go beyond immediate relief; they foster long-term resilience by building social capital, promoting community cohesion, and ensuring that recovery efforts are culturally and religiously appropriate. The insights provided by Riza’s study are invaluable as they highlight both the strengths and potential pitfalls of CSO involvement. Positive social capital can lead to stronger, more resilient communities, while negative consequences might arise from mismanagement or misalignment with a community’s needs. By examining these dynamics, Riza’s work provides a nuanced understanding that can inform better practices and policies for disaster recovery.

Riza’s thoughts in his book remind me of the aftermath of the 2004 IOT when numerous donors, including CSOs, arrived with their diverse perspectives and programs. One such initiative was the “Cash for Work” program, which aimed to help local people by providing them with paid work to clean their homes and surroundings. This program facilitated immediate recovery efforts and contributed to the local economy. However, despite its benefits, the program also had some negative impacts. It sometimes created dependency, with people relying on these temporary jobs

instead of seeking more sustainable employment. Additionally, the influx of external funds and initiatives occasionally disrupted local social structures and traditional working methods, leading to community tensions and misunderstandings.

Moreover, Riza's focus on smaller-scale disasters like the Gayo Highlands earthquake and Mt. Kelud eruption broadens the scope of disaster studies in Indonesia. Large-scale events like the 2004 IOT often overshadow these smaller yet significant disasters. By including these cases, Riza underscores the importance of localized recovery efforts and the role of CSOs in these contexts. This approach fills a gap in the literature and offers practical insights for policymakers and practitioners working on disaster recovery in diverse settings. Through this detailed and localized analysis, Riza's work truly shines, offering a comprehensive view of how CSOs can effectively contribute to disaster resilience and recovery.

Riza brilliantly employs the concept of social capital by categorizing it into bonding, bridging, and linking. Bonding social capital refers to the strong ties within a community, such as those among family members and close friends, which are crucial for immediate relief efforts. Bridging social capital involves connections between socially heterogeneous groups, facilitating broader community support and resource sharing. Linking social capital connects communities with institutions and organizations, including government and external agencies, enabling access to larger networks and resources. This nuanced exploration of social capital highlights the multi-dimensional role of CSOs in fostering community resilience and recovery. It is an insightful choice that deepens our understanding of how various forms of social capital can be leveraged to support disaster-hit communities effectively.

In addition, future research could benefit from a comparative analysis of CSOs' roles in different cultural and religious contexts within Indonesia and beyond. Such studies could reveal how varying cultural norms and religious beliefs influence the effectiveness of CSOs in disaster recovery. This expanded focus would enhance our understanding of CSOs' contributions and provide a more global perspective on disaster resilience. By integrating these insights, scholars could develop more inclusive and adaptable strategies for disaster recovery, ensuring that all communities can benefit from the support and solidarity that CSOs offer in times of crisis.

While Riza's book is comprehensive, there are areas for future research and improvement. One area for future exploration is the long-term impact of CSOs on social capital beyond the immediate recovery phase. Additionally, expanding the study to include more diverse types of disasters and regions could provide a broader understanding of the role of CSOs in disaster recovery. Riza could also consider incorporating more quantitative data to complement the qualitative insights, providing a more balanced analysis. Another potential area for improvement is a deeper examination of the challenges and limitations CSOs face in different cultural and political contexts, which could offer valuable lessons for improving disaster recovery efforts globally.

Riza's book is a valuable addition to the disaster recovery literature, offering theoretical insights and practical recommendations for enhancing the role of Islamic CSOs in building resilient communities. I congratulate Riza on this significant contribution and firmly believe that his work will become one of the most cited references in the field, especially for those focusing on community-based studies. By addressing the areas for future research and improvement, Riza's work can continue to contribute significantly to our understanding of disaster recovery and resilience in Southeast Asia and beyond.