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## Engaging Rebels in Tsunami Reconstruction Efforts

The horrific tsunami that leveled many coastal communities throughout South and South East Asia has garnered the attention of the world and relief efforts are now underway to help rebuild these communities. The impact of the wave was particularly felt in two long standing civil conflicts. The Tamil areas of Sri Lanka and the Aceh province of Indonesia, both sites of violent separatist movements, were also two of the most affected areas. Casualty and damage figures for these areas are slowly trickling out, but their status as rebel held territories limits the speed with which information about each emerges and, more dangerously, the potential for timely reconstruction efforts.

Surprisingly, it is not the lack of authority in these areas, but long standing norms about the role of recognized governments that is the greatest hindrance to rebuilding. The philosopher Thomas Hobbes, best known for theorizing the role of government as the sole force against the anarchy that lives within human souls, is the father of this assumption, incorrect though it may be. While rebels necessarily engage in violence against the state that appears random or irrational, the truth is they behave in ways analyzable to those willing to take them seriously. More importantly, despite Hobbes prediction, that areas outside the control of a government would resort to anarchy, rebels often develop administrations that come to resemble and even supersede the efforts of recognized governments to provide services to local populations.

In my own research in rebel controlled areas, I have found that rebel movements are highly responsive to pressures from the international community. Rebels are rarely just militaristic entities, but rather operate in ways comparable to state governments. They make calculations that affect their decision making process in direct ways, especially in regards to treatment of local communities. This is particularly true for separatist movements like the ones in Sri Lanka's north and east and in Indonesia's Aceh province. The logic is simple. The state does not provide you with equal resources for development or excludes you in some other way. If the discrimination persists, a rebel movement may get established to fight for greater autonomy for that region. Birthed to fight for greater representation and better treatment of a local population, the movement must be willing and able to prove that they can better provide that which they claim to be fighting for in the first place, i.e. better governance. Thus, in Sri Lanka, the rebel organization has established an extensive civil administration that administers areas they have taken away from the state, including a banking system, a legal system, and a health care system. In Aceh, rebels have long attempted to establish a parallel administration, though heavy handed tactics by Indonesian forces have limited their ability to provide services. Both have been able to draw on support from their diasporas in the west, who are often hounded by western governments for providing financial and other resources to rebel movements.

The reality is that many rebel movements do have legitimacy in communities they operate within. But more importantly, especially in this time of crisis, they have better networks and systems of delivery that would allow for effective reconstruction. If the international community can provide rebels with support for their governance efforts—without condemning their broader political agenda—they are very likely to change their behavior in ways that benefit all. Rebels

benefit from being granted financial support and a degree of legitimacy for their operations. The international community gains from being able to access areas that previously may have been ignored. By engaging with rebel organizations, as my research shows, they are also able to affect the behavior of movements in a positive manner. And most importantly, local communities benefit from gaining access to international aid efforts and the improved behavior of rebel administrations.