

# Haiyan aid response must avoid tsunami mistakes: expert

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The disaster response to typhoon Haiyan must avoid the mistakes made by aid organisations after the 2004 tsunami, RMIT University's Associate Professor Martin Mulligan says.

Associate Professor Mulligan was a Chief Investigator on a research project conducted for the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) on what could be learned from the post-tsunami social recovery operation in Sri Lanka and southern India.

He says the images of total destruction emerging out of The Philippines remind him of the horrors he witnessed in Sri Lanka, in the wake of the tsunami.

"It is always the most vulnerable people who bear the brunt of such ferocious [disasters](#) and I'm not convinced that the [disaster response](#) 'industry' has learnt the lessons on how to rebuild devastated communities," he said.

"The immediate post-tsunami relief effort was impressive but many mistakes were made – perhaps inevitably – in the targeting of aid for long-term social recovery.

"Aid organisations undoubtedly have more to learn from post-tsunami success stories about how to work within traumatised communities in order to ensure that aid funding is well targeted and effective."

The AusAID study led to the book *Rebuilding Community in the Wake of Disaster* by Associate Professor Mulligan and Yaso Nadarajah (2012, Routledge).

The book argues for a patient and "deliberative" approach by international aid organisations in order to ensure that the natural disaster does not result in post-disaster social division and conflict.

"This is a terrible time for Australia to be cutting its international aid budget and to be folding AusAID into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade," Associate Professor Mulligan said.

"Funding cuts and restructuring make it more difficult for Australia's aid organisations to learn and apply the lessons of past disaster experiences.

"Australia should make a generous contribution to the relief effort for the cyclone-affected areas in Leyte province. Relief must be delivered as quickly and efficiently as possible.

"However, once the immediate relief has been accomplished, the aid agencies should ensure that their efforts to rebuild devastated communities are informed by past experiences."

Provided by RMIT University

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