Issues Related to Data Collection in a Disastrous Area – A lesson from The Study of the Aftermath of Tsunami and Recovery in Indonesia

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On December 26, 2004 a massive earthquake struck in the Indian Ocean, creating a tsunami that slammed into the nearby island of Sumatra some 45 minutes later, resulting in unparalleled devastation. The tsunami subsequently traveled across the Indian Ocean, wreaking havoc on coastal areas throughout the region.

Estimates suggest that worldwide casualties number nearly 250,000 people. The vast majority of deaths occurred in Indonesia, where in some communities as much as 70% of the population is reported to have perished. The accuracy of these estimates is unclear, but it is clear that the disaster has taken a horrifying toll and that the timing and scope of the event was completely unanticipated.

The Study of the Tsunami Aftermath and Recovery (STAR), provides scientific evidence on the magnitude of this shock in Indonesia, as indicated by an array of social, economic and health indicators. STAR is a survey project that is funded by the World Bank and the MacArthur Foundation and is being conducted collaboratively by SurveyMETER (an Indonesian NGO) and researchers from the California Center for Population Research at the University of California, Los Angeles.

The goal of the STAR survey, which is currently in the field, is to provide information on the impact of the tsunami by re-interviewing SUSENAS (National Socio-Economic Survey) 2004 respondents who were living on the coast where the tsunami struck and collecting, in 2005, the same information on the health, socio-demographic and economic status of each individual that was collected in 2004. The follow-up surveys will locate all respondents who were interviewed in the 2004 wave of SUSENAS in coastal districts of Aceh and North Sumatra. A key advantage of using SUSENAS as a baseline for this project is that the sample sizes in each year are large. In 2004, over 12,000 households and over 50,000 people were interviewed in the areas that will be re-surveyed. All of these respondents will be tracked in the follow-up surveys including those who have moved away from the study site. While the vast majority of movers are likely to stay in Aceh and Sumut, we will track movers across the islands of Sumatra, Java and Bali.

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Tracking and finding respondents is a challenge in any longitudinal survey, but also the key to success. In such a disastrous area the task is very hard indeed. The goal of our poster submission and the accompanying paper is to describe our experiences, focusing on the process of determining whether respondents are alive or dead and finding respondents that have scattered throughout the area. Case studies will be developed to illustrate the success of the exercise. We will supplement our description and analysis with photographs and maps of the study area, which make this submission particularly appropriate for a poster session.