

in this way. Another measure taken by one rural community was to strip the dead before burial, and to place the clothes on sticks on top of the graves in the hope that somebody might recognise them. In some communities, photographs taken before the tsunami are displayed in the mosque and known victims marked with an X (Image 4).

Image 4. Community photographs identifying victims of the tsunami, Lhoknga, Aceh Besar, Indonesia 25th February 2005



Photograph: Oliver Morgan

Final disposal of remains

The majority of bodies from areas around Banda Aceh were buried in 14 mass graves. Lambaro, the largest mass grave, had an estimated 60-70,000 bodies. No map of the mass graves has been produced, although an NGO is proposing to map the GIS coordinates of all the graves. The location of the burial sites was decided by the Deputy Regional Government Officer. The main criteria appeared to be the availability of government owned land. Although the Australian military were consulted about the suitability of some sites with regards to environmental health, no guidelines or technical criteria about burial areas were available.

Consequently, the location of some of the mass graves was not ideal. For example, the mass grave at Guegajah with about 16,000 bodies was within a few meters of a community (Image 5). Also, Lambaro, the largest grave, is in plain view from the road leading from the airport.

Image 5. Mass grave sited within a few meters of residential houses, Guegajah, Aceh Besar, Indonesia 23rd February 2005



Photograph: Oliver Morgan

Most bodies were buried in body bags and placed in several layers within the graves (Image 6). It is not clear whether the body bags are biodegradable or if they may present any environmental problem in the future. There appears to be no attempt to follow any Muslim burial customs, such as making sure the body is facing Mecca. However, this does not appear to have caused widespread protest among the community. Nevertheless, there was a general desire amongst relatives of the deceased to know which mass grave their family members were buried. There are plans to erect memorials at many of the larger graves and to provide a place for relatives to visit.