

# Uplink Porong: Supporting community-driven responses to the mud volcano disaster in Sidoarjo, Indonesia

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gatekeeper

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137j: August 2009

The role of local  
organisations in  
sustainable  
development

# The roles of local organisations in poverty reduction and environmental management

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All poverty reduction is local. This is easy to forget given how discussion and debate on the subject is dominated by bilateral aid agencies, development banks, national governments and international NGOs. But regardless of higher level commitments and decisions, what actually happens on the ground in particular localities is what makes the difference. Many barriers to poverty reduction are local — local power structures, land owning patterns and anti-poor politicians, bureaucracies and regulations. Much of what the poor require — schools, healthcare, water and sanitation, land, social safety nets, getting onto voter registers — must be obtained from local organisations within this local context.

Local organisations have a major role in addressing these realities, helping poor groups access entitlements and engage with government. They may be local NGOs, grassroots organisations of the poor, or even local governments or branches of higher levels of government. But they function on a local level, have intimate knowledge of the local context and should be accountable to local people. Many operate on very small budgets, outside the main funding flows and frameworks. Yet they are not isolated from larger governance issues; indeed, much pro-poor political change has been catalysed by local innovations and by political pressure from grassroots organisations and their associations.

This publication is one in a series of case studies and synthesis papers looking at the work of local organisations in development and environmental management. These publications were developed in collaboration with the local organisations they profile. They seek to encourage international funding agencies to rethink the means by which they can support, work with and learn from the local organisations that are such a critical part of pro-poor development.

IIED and its partners are grateful to Irish Aid, The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DGIS), The Department for International Development (DFID), and The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) for their support for this work on local organisations.

**The gatekeeper series** of the Natural Resources Group at IIED is produced by the Sustainable Agriculture, Biodiversity and Livelihoods Programme. The series aims to highlight key topics in the field of sustainable natural resource management. Each paper reviews a selected issue of contemporary importance and draws preliminary conclusions for development that are particularly relevant for policymakers, researchers and planners. References are provided to important sources and background material. The series is published three times a year and is supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). The views expressed in this paper are those of the author(s), and do not necessarily represent those of the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) or any of their partners.

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## Executive summary

In May 2006, the exploratory search for natural gas deposits in the Sidoarjo area of Indonesia by Indonesian corporation PT Lapindo Brantas led to a devastating mud volcano which is still flowing today and which displaced thousands of people, ruined farmland, roads and other infrastructure. Neither the government nor the corporation whose drilling was probably responsible for the mud volcano were prepared to address the needs of those who had lost their homes, their villages and their livelihoods. As this paper describes, the corporation denied that its drilling had caused the mud volcano and instead sought to limit any compensation paid, to curb the organisation of affected communities and to discourage the involvement of international agencies. The government has done little to address the needs of the tens of thousands who were displaced and the even larger numbers whose livelihoods have been affected.

This paper profiles the work of a small Indonesian NGO, Uplink Porong, in supporting the many affected households and different village organisations to work together, to develop and implement their own preferred responses and to lobby for support for these. It highlights the importance of support for this kind of grassroots organising and networking building among those affected by disasters as an important foundation for more appropriate, locally-rooted post-disaster responses. As the profile shows, Uplink has encountered people-driven processes in a context in which the government and private sector are closely intertwined. These difficulties include the politics around the cause of the disaster (and thus responsibility), the private sector's ability to disempower (by weakening co-operation), the need for international support beyond funding, and the lack of understanding of the destruction caused by human-made disasters, particularly where loss of life has not evoked the world's sympathy or keenness to get involved. The authors suggest that the most important response from external donors would have been to provide on-the-ground long-term support for those affected to build their capacities to develop and implement their own solutions.

# Uplink Porong: Supporting community-driven responses to the mud volcano disaster in Sidoarjo, Indonesia

Mujtaba Hamdi, Wardah Hafidz, and Gabriela Sauter

## Introduction

Uplink Porong is part of the national network of Uplink Indonesia,<sup>1</sup> and was established in 2007 as a response to the suffering of over 20,000 villagers as their homes, settlements and livelihoods were destroyed by a mud volcano in Sidoarjo. By focusing on the strength and capacity of those who have been displaced, this profile seeks to show how people deal with disaster-related problems, and how organisations like Uplink can facilitate their links and negotiation with government, international agencies and other relevant actors. It is not a question of what Uplink is doing, but *how and what the people are doing*. Uplink is a supporter in the background, a facilitator of community-led advocacy, negotiation, and problem-solving.

This paper profiles the work of Uplink Porong in order to draw out wider implications for community organisation, foreign aid/funding and advocacy in the context of disaster response. Responses to human-made disasters (as discussed below) bring with them a whole separate set of problems, particularly political and economic, that fundamentally affect how communities are rehabilitated. For instance, these relate to compensation, government support, justice, funding (local/global), international support, and most importantly, people's own abilities to organise themselves and advocate for their needs. This profile highlights the many difficulties encountered by Uplink in attempting to facilitate people-driven processes in a context in which the government and private sector were closely intertwined. These difficulties included the politics around the cause of the disaster (and thus responsibility), the private

1. Uplink Porong is part of a national network of 14 secretariats across Indonesia, established in 2002 by the Urban Poor Consortium (UPC). UPC's focus is to show the strength of people, to help establish community organisations like Uplink Porong, and to support them throughout their development. This is one of four profiles of Uplink secretariats; the others are: *Renovation, Not Relocation: The work of the Paguyuban Warga Strenkali (PWS) in Indonesia* (Wawan Some, Wardah Hafidz, and Gabriela Sauter, *Gatekeeper* 137h); *Reconstructing Life after the Tsunami: The work of Uplink Banda Aceh in Indonesia* (Ade Syukrizal, Wardah Hafidz, and Gabriela Sauter, *Gatekeeper* 137i); and *The How, When and Why of Community Organisational Support: Uplink Yogyakarta in Indonesia* (Awali Saeful Thohir, Wardah Hafidz and Gabriela Sauter, *Gatekeeper* 137k). These profiles were developed with the support of the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR).

sector's ability to disempower (by weakening co-operation), the need for international support beyond funding, and the lack of understanding of the destruction caused by human-made disasters, particularly where loss of life has not evoked the world's sympathy or keenness to get involved.

## Background

The exploratory search for natural gas deposits in Sidoarjo by Indonesian corporation PT Lapindo Brantas came to a sudden halt on May 28th, 2006 when the removal of the drilling equipment resulted in a massive upsurge of gases and mud at high pressure (the main cause of the eruption appears to be the reckless drilling in which the company did not apply safety casing to its drilling equipment). The company responded by using the drill to replug the well, but a subsequent explosion of mud and gases in a nearby rice paddy proved the mud's determination to escape. This created a mud volcano, which the locals have called Lusi (short for *Lumpur* Sidoarjo or Sidoarjo mud), and which continues to flow, several years later. Lapindo made some attempts to plug the hole, including the use of a 'snapping unit,' a relief well, and the insertion of a chain of cement balls, but the company's lack of any serious commitment to the surrounding community and environment has meant these attempts were soon abandoned. On the night of November 22, 2006, over ten lives were lost when a gas pipe exploded from excessive heat due to the mud.

Lusi has now created a mud lake that initially submerged four villages (Kedung Bendo, Jatirejo, Renokenongo and Siring). These four communities, totalling 1,600 families or 6,138 women, children and men, were relocated to a newly constructed unused covered market. The government created an earth levee to contain the mud flood, but mud seeping underneath the levee system and occasional ruptures in the high walls by heavy rain have meant many more villages are being slowly submerged under the thick blanket of mud. To date, over 20,000 families have been displaced from 14 villages within a 3km radius of the well centre. The slow expansion of the mud lake means people have been watching their houses and communities being destroyed—in every sense—over an extended period of time, but the slow unfolding of the disaster means they are not securing the help and attention most sudden disasters would procure.

While some farmers have lost their land to mud, others have lost their source of drinking and irrigation water as one river has been fragmented by the massive levee and the other is being destroyed by the government's attempts to redirect the mudflow into the sea (see below). Those fortunate enough to still be able to farm in this once very fertile area suffer from a lack of access to the local market (Box 1). In addition, over 20 factories, a major East Java highway, and a railway line have been buried (Bonner and Suhartono, 2006), fundamentally affecting the region's economy. People have not only lost their homes, but their jobs and their livelihoods as well.

### BOX 1. THE WIDER IMPACTS

The village of Permisan has been deeply affected by the mud volcano, despite being several kilometres from the mudflow. In this village most livelihoods are based on fishing and farming. Villagers depend on the water provided by two rivers, the Jatirejo and the Porong, for irrigation and holding ponds. While the Jatirejo River has been broken up by the mud levee, the Porong River no longer provides sufficient water since the mud has been redirected into the river. The villagers' access to markets has also been limited because the levee is so big that they now have to go right around it. This means high transport costs to get to/from the nearest market. Mr Imiawan is an active community organiser for the village of Permisan. He took part in a community organiser workshop in Jakarta in August 2007, and has since tried to apply his training to strengthen his own community. He has been helping to promote programmes like KBA (a children's study group), Koran education, and economic development. *"These are strategies to make our community stronger so when we need to fight against Lapindo and the government, we have a good foundation, good bonding."* The community has formed a farming co-operative from which they can take out loans. *"Farmers just have money when they harvest, so their economic situation is unstable. The cooperative is a strategy to help stabilize. And since productivity has decreased, this is important."* The community has not negotiated with Lapindo for compensation, but it is trying to convince the government that their livelihoods are being affected by the environmental degradation the government is so eager to deny. Mr Imiawan comments: *"Our community is definitely stronger now. We are now negotiating with the National Department of Fisheries to explain how the Lusi is affecting their environment and livelihood."* They have just recently begun to network with other villages with similar problems and this is helping them share information: about the steps they are taking, what they will demand from government, and what others are doing so they can co-ordinate.

Source: Meeting with Mr Mundzir Dwi Imiawan

## The official response to Lusi

### Compensation

Supposedly, Lapindo continues to search for a solution to the problem, but the multi-million dollar corporation claims to have a 'limited budget' as a result of its attempts to deal with the situation to date. Many attempts to sell-off Lapindo have been unsuccessful and the current ownership remains unclear. According to the New York Times, *"as the liabilities have escalated, Lapindo was sold — for \$2 — last month [in September 2006] to an offshore company, owned by the Bakrie Group, and many fear it will declare bankruptcy, allowing its owners to walk away"* (Bonner and Suhartono, 2006). The Lapindo Disaster cannot be better described than by Nur Hidayati of Greenpeace Southeast Asia:

*The Lapindo mudflow disaster stands out as an iconic example of a corporate crime, demonstrating how irresponsible activities by big business continue to wreak havoc on the environment and people's lives. Corporations are rewarded with overgenerous opportunities and rights to profit from the exploitation of the*

*environment. At the first sign of trouble, they tend to take flight leaving their legacies of suffering and degradation behind. The Lapindo disaster is a classic example of this trend (Greenpeace, 2006)*

The government's involvement in the rehabilitation of Lusi-affected families did not begin until February 2007. It established PP 14 2007, a regulation apparently created for the protection of the people. It states that the four villages that were initially flooded are entitled to compensation from Lapindo under a 20%-80% scheme whereby people got 20% of their compensation immediately and 80% two years later. The 20% was only calculated on the size of their lost house and land size measured in square metres, and ignored other losses such as social cohesion, infrastructure, economic assets and jobs. Most of the villages, having waited a year for any form of compensation, accepted this despite the small amount involved (although see Box 2). Recently, Lapindo has decided to change its policy and is now providing the last 80% as a relocation plot, conveniently owned by another branch of the same company. This applies even to those who signed the initial contract for cash compensation—but since no copy of the contract was provided to the villagers, they have little to back up their claims. Many of those who originally agreed to the 20%-80% scheme had already purchased land and had begun to build, but once the scheme changed, they were forced to move to the relocation site, losing the 20% in cash that they had received earlier. Furthermore, while compensation was calculated according to the square metre (using different rates for the house and land), the rates are low, and housing on Lapindo's relocation site is expensive. This means larger families can only afford to buy much smaller houses and areas of land than they had before. Those who had a small plot of land cannot afford to purchase any of the houses or land plots available. The future is very uncertain for these survivors. Who will pay the difference between their compensation and the high prices they face at their mandatory relocation site? Not only are they forced to move to a site where they have no choice in the matter, but the lifestyle and living culture will be a tremendous change for these families, who have been accustomed to their space, place, and independence. It has become obvious that Lapindo's ideas of relocation are very different from those of the evicted communities.

## Physical reconstruction

In order to deal with Lusi's impacts, the President of Indonesia ordered the creation of a special body, the BPLS. This only came into existence in March 2007—one year after the initial eruption. Its focus is to contain the mud, and it has begun channelling mud into the Porong River to carry it to the sea. In a discussion with BPLS officials in June 2008, they claimed that ecological research reports prove that the environmental impacts of off-loading hot mud into the river are negligible and will not compromise the environmental integrity of the region. It is difficult for local inhabitants to believe that mud at a temperature of over 60°C will not damage the delicate ecosystems of both the river and the sea, not to mention the sedimentation caused by a year of dumping mud. BPLS's plans to deal with the sediment are to dilute the mud with water so it will flow better downstream. They are relying on the rainy season to help push mud



into the sea, That is, only if as long as the mud does not cause the river to flood once the rains do hit arrive, particularly after what is expected to be a very long dry season, and thus a very long period of continuous sedimentation.

While the first four communities have been officially moved to the market,<sup>2</sup> families from other villages have set up temporary displacement camps along the highway, moved in with family and friends elsewhere, or continue to live in their houses if flooding has not yet reached their doorstep. Lapindo's assistance for the evictees was limited to providing food for a period of time for those in the market. BPLS has had no role in the social and environmental welfare of the displaced people.

The Lapindo Disaster has been covered extensively, locally, nationally, and internationally, from *Jawa Pos*, to the *BBC*, *The New York Times*, *Asia Times Online*, *International Herald Tribune*, and even the *National Geographic*. But few discuss the social struggle and upheaval for local communities that ensued from the physical, social, economic and environmental destruction,<sup>3</sup> or the social turbulence caused by the government and Lapindo's manipulation of the situation at all levels (see below).

## A new approach: community organisation

Before Lusi, these communities would not have been considered poor, given their relatively high levels of social and economic welfare based on a thriving marine economy (fish and prawns) and great natural wealth, including fertile lands and oil and gas. They are organised according to traditional patron-client patterns, and rely on the links that community leaders (who are mostly religious heads) have with government. These are villages that rely on the collective. Thus, when the disaster hit, their co-operation was very strong, and it was easy for them to unite. But the fact that the company was working hand-in-hand with the government made it very difficult for the people to work collectively (see below). The struggle began strongly, with significant support from the media, NGOs, CBOs and international organisations and advocacy from local, provincial, national and international organisations. But as the media coverage fell away and many NGOs failed to develop any long-term solutions and also moved on, any hope for finding a just and agreed solution to the situation began to fade. Today few organisations remain active in the process—some play more of an advocacy role based in Jakarta (eg. WALHI: the Indonesian chapter of Friends of the Earth), some come and go, and some provide supplies in kind (rice, sugar, etc). Few have a local presence on the ground.

### **Uplink: facilitating community organisation at the local level**

Uplink remains one of the only organisations in the field in Porong. It focuses strongly on community organisation, trying to create a sense of unity among affected villages. This has been a difficult task as new social rifts have been created by the unequal and

2. Three of these four have since relocated to live with friends and family elsewhere or are renting accommodation in neighbouring villages, given the poor living conditions at the market site.

3. For more information and updates, an online blog is available at [www.hotmudflow.wordpress.com](http://www.hotmudflow.wordpress.com)

inequitable division of compensation and unfulfilled promises by the government and Lapindo. Uplink's first involvement with Lusi began on December 26, 2006. Two members from other Uplink secretariats (in Makasar and Surabaya) arrived in Porong to observe the situation and learn about the social and environmental problems created by the mud volcano. In January 2007, Uplink decided to maintain a presence in the area and to help wherever possible. Its initial area of concentration was on the communities living in the market place, but it has since expanded to work with other communities affected by Lusi. It began by donating strips of cloth to provide a minimal amount of privacy for the 1,800 families living under the market's roof. When communities began getting ill from the food provided by the catering company Lapindo had hired to feed the people living in the market, Uplink helped the community to cook for itself.

Although Uplink maintains a presence in the communities affected by Lusi, it does not keep a secretariat or an office, as its approach is to integrate with the community rather than watch from a distance, as many other NGOs would choose to do. Uplink support takes many forms, but with the common thread of very limited funding. Activities include organising training programmes in *Arpillera*, a form of Chilean art that has proven to be very useful in post-traumatic healing in Aceh; making *Jamu*, a traditional Javanese herbal medication; and *Tali Kur* bag-making. Uplink also helped establish a kindergarten for children, now run by members of the University of Petra, as well as a playgroup for children after they attend kindergarten. Perhaps more importantly, Uplink was involved in advocacy and helping to facilitate community organisation within and amongst the communities.

Mrs Siti, a woman from Renokenongo who still lives in the market (where she gave birth to her daughter) comments: *"I am very proud of Uplink because it is the first organisation that came here. It is the pioneer – Uplink really established itself while the others came and left. Although Uplink can't help in material things, Uplink placed people to give support, struggle together, give spirit to the people. When we didn't know what anything was about, who the company was, what the PP. no. 14 2007 was about, Uplink helped us understand the situation."* Mrs Siti explains the implications of giving birth to and raising a young child under such conditions. The water is not clean and there is often a queue to access the taps. She comments on the social impacts on her eldest daughter: *"Fida was an obedient girl in Renokenongo, but here there are a lot of bad influences and the children are out of control. Maybe she is not comfortable staying here. In Renokenongo, Fida went to school for 5 hours, and now the school is far away, the transportation services are bad, and she is only in school for 3 hours a day. So now my husband has to spend time accompanying Fida to school and back, and in the mean time, if I have to go somewhere, I have to bring my baby to my neighbour because my husband is not around to take care of her."*

In December 2007, the villagers and members of Uplink travelled to Jakarta for a month-long demonstration against the compensation terms at the National Parliament, the Office of the Ministry of Social Welfare, the President's Office, UN-Habitat, and the National Human Rights Commission. Uplink used its national network to advocate against the PP 14 2007 law, as well as its international contacts to let

people know that this case is not over yet. Since the communities have little experience in interacting with government, Uplink helped the people of Porong organise their demonstrations, and contacted important organisations that could help them in their cause. It introduced the community to organisations like LBH, a law foundation that facilitated a judiciary review for the community. Ms Lilik Kaminah, a primary school teacher who was involved in the demonstrations in Jakarta and also took part in the 10 day community organiser workshop at UPC in August 2007, explains: *"If we want to talk to the local (Sidoarjo) government, Uplink says we have to prepare what to say. So when we meet, we have the ability to be critical and hold our own opinion. We learned that we have to know our own opinion first. And now we have learned who to talk to, about what."*

#### **BOX 2. COMMUNITIES FIGHT FOR BETTER COMPENSATION ARRANGEMENTS**

Paguyugan Rakyat Renokenongo Menolak Kontrak (or Pagar Recontrak) is a community organisation formed in 2007 with support from Uplink. Pagar Recontrak is formed by community members from Renokenongo, the last of the four villages to remain in the relocation market. The villagers demonstrated against the 20%-80% compensation scheme, arguing that another environmental law (no. 23 1997)<sup>4</sup> applied in this case, and demanding that the unfavourable 20%-80% payment terms be changed.

Their struggle lasted 14 months and involved nine rounds of negotiation. Eventually they gave up hope of ever reaching a fair agreement, and Pagar Recontrak accepted the unfair terms for the compensation offered by Lapindo, in the form of relocation. But because of further delays in the compensation process, they continue to live in their temporary shelters in the market.

Although national government was present at the negotiations, they did nothing to facilitate the negotiations or take into consideration the welfare of the affected communities.

When Lapindo ceased providing food to the market community, Pagar Recontrak mobilised the community to demonstrate for more food to be provided. The government held a meeting with Lapindo and the community and when talks again proved unsuccessful, the government agreed to pressure Lapindo. This, it seems, has also been unsuccessful.

An Uplink community organiser notes: *"if we organise communities, we can help them be critical of the problems they face next. We don't give people a solution, but a way of how to reach it. This way, communities no longer feel helpless and start to feel like they can solve their own problems – and this is understood in three steps: from dependence, to independence, to interdependence."* Uplink helps people evolve from being individuals unable to act, to becoming self-determining individuals and community players. And this is the basis from which communities can start to negotiate and fight for rights that have been violated. Once communities are organised and are linked into networks, they can better address the problems and issues they face. That is, "more people are stronger than one person, and more communities are stronger than one community. If they are organised in a network, communities are less likely to fight

4. This law makes those who degrade the environment liable for dealing with its associated consequences, including compensation and restoration.

each other and are more focused on the real enemy. There is one enemy here, Lapindo and the government... not other villages." This has proven to be a very fundamental issue in Porong, as many communities have lost sight of their goals.

## Threats to community organisation

### Manipulation by Lapindo

Lapindo has been using its power to limit community organisation. By withholding information from the communities of Porong, they can place themselves in a position of control, able to manipulate the people and change the terms of compensation at will. Since the traditional community structure is based on a few dominant leaders, the company has successfully co-opted the leaders and taken advantage of the lack of community organisation. According to Wardah Hafidz, coordinator of The Urban Poor Consortium (UPC), the first year after the eruption was a *"funfair of NGOs, politicians, academics, activists, etc., a big stage to get the spotlight. But they did not stay for long. Right from the beginning the company said we don't want any outsiders and will deal only with the community"*. Lapindo threatened the communities, saying that if they sought external help, they would not get compensation—and people were then forced to discourage other organisations from providing assistance, leaving Lapindo with even greater room for manipulation and manoeuvre. By discouraging external help and convincing the local community that external donors are trying to deceive them, Lapindo could adjust the terms of compensation more in their favour, as communities were less likely to organise themselves and negotiate for fairer compensation. And intimidation on Lapindo's part does not end there. In demonstrations, community members recall, they were often outnumbered three to one by the police, national intelligence, and military. One person remembers: *"why didn't the military protect us but [instead] protect the company that already has so much power and has destroyed our community?"*

### Manipulation by the government

The government agency BPLS has also used 'divide and rule' tactics, providing different terms of compensation to different groups, and playing off one community or group of communities against another to weaken the organisation process and protest. Currently, BPLS is *"waiting for the determination of a new rule for compensation"*, according to a member of staff<sup>5</sup>, which means further delay in clarifying the compensation for community members of the surrounding 14 villages.

### Allocating blame

*The politics surrounding the disaster are as muddy as the landscape. PT Lapindo Brantas, the company that operated the ill-fated well, is partly owned by the family of Aburizal Bakrie, Indonesia's chief welfare minister. Bakrie, a billionaire, says the well had nothing to do with the catastrophe; he blames it on a powerful earthquake that struck Yogyakarta, 170 miles (270 kilometres) away, two days before*

5. In a meeting with the contact author on June 27th, 2008 in Porong.

*the mud flood. He has yet to visit Lusi's victims* (Andrew Marshall, National Geographic July 2008).

The interconnectedness of government and Lapindo reduces any possibility that the government will ensure a just solution for the people of Porong. This is also not helped by the relationship between Aburizal Bakrie (whose family owns the majority of the Bakrie Group) and the Golongan Karya Party, which holds the majority of seats in the current government. Bakrie funded the party's elections campaign, continues to support the party financially, and also plays an advisory role to the party. This helps explain the lack of interference by government in the Lapindo Disaster and the sole focus of BPLS on maintaining the levee system.

For most, the failure to use the proper precautions (in terms of using drill casing) is evidence enough to hold Lapindo responsible for the redressing of Lusi's devastation. But the fact that there was an earthquake in Yogyakarta two days before the mud volcano, gives some grounds for questioning whether it was caused by the drilling or the earthquake. Those who side with (or are co-opted by) Lapindo claim the earthquake of 6.3 on the Richter Scale in Yogyakarta, 250 km from the mud volcano was the cause of the mud volcano. However, many specialists, including Richard Davies from Durham University who has researched the study in detail, claim the earthquake was too weak and too far away to have had such an impact, barely reaching two on the Richter Scale in Porong (Davies *et al.*, 2008). A report by Friends of the Earth indicates the large discrepancies between different sources of information on affected communities, on the environmental impacts of the mud and its channelling, and most importantly, on the likely causes of the eruption (Pohl, 2007). In February 2008, the Department of Environment concluded that the disaster was not related to human error, but was a natural disaster related to seismic activity in Indonesia two days prior.

Lapindo's support from a handful of experts and government officials has played a major role in ignoring Environment Act 23/1997, which states that those who degrade the environment are responsible for its restoration and other associated consequences, such as compensation to those negatively affected by the degradation. Since, according to Lapindo and government, there is little evidence to prove Lapindo's guilt in the Lusi disaster, the Environment Act 23/1997 cannot be drawn on to deal with Lusi's consequences. PP 14 2007 was created almost one year after the disaster to deal with Lusi-related compensation, and this significantly protected Lapindo from extensive responsibility. Despite the establishment of a special government working group on this issue, the government has done little to support the people of Porong, apart from maintaining the levee.

### **Community despair and discord**

The process of trying to secure fair compensation has been a long one, and many community members have lost hope in their struggle. Pagar Recontrak, the community organisation of Renokenongo village, finally agreed to Lapindo's 20-80% relocation scheme and people feel that even now these promises will not be fulfilled. They have yet to see any changes. People also have a feeling of desertion, as the number of NGOs and activist groups

has fallen, no facilities for water or education were provided by Lapindo or the government, and the government failed to help with the provision of food or any other forms of support.

This desperation has also led to much social discord, with some community members beginning to feel that they are more important and better educated than others, resulting in segregation. Other groups have decided to work independently. There are also some cases where community leaders have tried to profit from the situation, claiming they have access to the government and can help solve a problem. When they do actually receive compensation, people are expected to pay a certain percentage for 'services rendered'. According to an Uplink community organiser *"We call them merchants: they sell a problem to make a profit."*

### **Uplink's capacity**

There were also many difficulties relating to Uplink capacity. The Lapindo Disaster occurred shortly after the Indian Ocean tsunami in late 2004. Many senior Uplink staff members were thus still working in tsunami-affected Aceh (Northern Sumatra) at the time when Lusi began discharging mud. When it became apparent that Lusi was a serious long-term disaster, these members of staff had already spent two years away from their homes and were returning to organise communities in their home towns. As a result, the community organisers sent to Porong were young and inexperienced: *"It's not about money. People just don't want to join us here. This is such a big case and the enemy has so much money and power. The idea of coming here is very daunting and many people are too pessimistic to fight these big powers. This is a big problem with a little person fighting"*, comments one of the two current community organisers. Since Uplink chooses to maintain an onsite presence rather than an office, living conditions for employees are difficult, which means organisers are less inclined to stay for extended periods of time.

How has Uplink dealt with this situation? Uplink and UPC are now trying to document Lusi's community struggle and its socio-environmental impacts so that other organisations can see that the fight has only just begun. They are trying to encourage others to involve themselves, both in the advocacy process, but also at the community level. They have also encouraged a group called the Anti-Authoritarian Network to become involved, who are now working with Uplink in Porong. This is a national network of university students (for the most part) who are disenchanted with NGOs, donors and mainstream approaches to local problems. At the community level, Uplink is improving the management of information so as to strengthen people's critical awareness and militancy to keep fighting and remain united.

## **Overcoming the challenges: lessons for donors and NGOs**

Although the mud volcano has mobilised many different communities for demonstrations and advocacy both at the local and national levels, this profile does, however, also show how powerful vested interests can curb the development of such organisa-

tions and prevent fair and equitable access to compensation, while failing to protect the rights of those affected by human-induced disasters. By playing one organisation off against another and using power and money to limit community movements to very small initiatives, Lapindo and BPLS have developed an effective approach to undermining community processes and discouraging the involvement and help of external organisations.

For external organisations to be effective in situations like this, they need to understand first and foremost their barriers to entry, and how they can respond to these barriers in order to make a meaningful contribution to communities who are trying to organise and fight for their rights. This applies to all the different kinds of external organisations, including international and local NGOs, donors, bilaterals, charities and activist groups. Four main issues need to be understood:

## Facilitating co-operation

Because people and organisations are affected by disasters in different ways and also understand their situation in different ways, it is impossible for them to come together instantly, especially in the early stages, without facilitation. It often requires some time before organisations understand their mutual (or at least similar) objectives and learn to work together. This is true for community organisations, NGOs and external funding agencies. Without co-operation, they tend to work on their own projects or programmes without co-ordination between groups. In Porong, community organisations all tried to negotiate with Lapindo and the government for compensation separately, and often in competition with one another. The same is true for organisations working with the people affected by Lusi; they came in at different times, offered their services and left once their budgets ran out or felt they could no longer be of assistance. What is needed is discussion, understanding, then co-ordination between such organisations so that they can help communities work together to establish a united front in their negotiation processes.

## Understanding the political barriers to responses

The Lapindo Disaster is a big national issue: the company responsible is Indonesian, the government dealing with it is Indonesian and the people suffering from its effects are Indonesian.<sup>6</sup> Donors and international NGOs do not always want to get involved in a case that is internal to one nation and which involves violence, repression and manipulation of information. The intertwining of politics and corporations scares many assistance organisations away.

Furthermore, Lapindo made every attempt to hide this case from international eyes and to discourage the involvement of external organisations by threatening its victims. Despite many attempts by UPC to convince the international arena that this is an important and pressing issue, many organisations claim they have no entry point.

6. In contrast, the tsunami that hit Aceh province only months before shows how disparate cases can be in terms of international intervention, funding, and involvement, even within the same country. Aceh was affected by the tsunami one day after Christmas, and many tourists were also victims. This had an important role in mobilising global funds and assistance.

Ironically, this is precisely what they do have: from the violation of basic human rights to the very large environmental impacts. These issues need be acknowledged. It should also be noted that a strong government response to a disaster should occur independent of whether it was a 'natural' or 'human-induced' disaster.

The slow nature of the destruction caused by Lusi perhaps helps explain the lesser interest it attracted from international agencies. Its political complications mean that many of these organisations see it more as a political issue rather than a socio-environmental disaster caused by an oil and gas corporation. This lack of mobilisation and the greater focus on natural disasters, such as the tsunami in the South Pacific and earthquakes in Kashmir, Indonesia, etc., have meant that getting funds for Porong has been very difficult for Uplink and the UPC. Many donors claim their sources were depleted from the natural disasters that occurred around the world.

## Seeing beyond the money

The final issue highlighted in this profile is donors' over-concentration on money. International NGOs and official donors rarely go beyond providing money when they involve themselves in funding projects or programmes. For them, the issues are how much money, who spends the money, how is the money to be spent and who can account for the money? This so often means that other aspects of development are left out, while a flood of money can alter the way communities respond to money and their entitlements to it (see *Gatekeeper* 137i). Although funding the process in Porong is important, there is also a need to connect expertise and concerns, as well as facilitate more people-to-people contact. These relationships are stronger and more long-term than relationships built solely on financial transactions. And in a different respect, the effectiveness of financial support in actually helping those who have lost homes and livelihoods is often much reduced by overly formal and regulatory funding mechanisms for proposals and reports. Perhaps the most important support from external donors could have been on the ground long-term support to build the capacity of those affected to develop and then implement their own solutions.



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**ISSN 1357-9258**

Design: Piers Aitman

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