

Reconstructing Life After the Tsunami: The work of Uplink Banda Aceh in Indonesia

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gatekeeper

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**The role of local
organisations in
sustainable
development**

The roles of local organisations in poverty reduction and environmental management

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.

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Executive summary

The global response to the 2004 tsunami that devastated coastal Asia was rapid; more funds were donated for this single disaster than for all others of this nature the entire previous year. But this flood of money and international aid has in fact made integrated reconstruction a very difficult task.

The NGO Uplink Banda Aceh (UBA) was established shortly after the tsunami largely destroyed the infrastructure and a large proportion of the population of Banda Aceh Province in Indonesia. This paper describes UBA's work, which began with post-disaster emergency relief, but quickly moved into promoting and supporting community organisations in a network of 23 villages as they tried to rebuild their lives.

Banda Aceh has been described as being hit by two tsunamis; the second tsunami was the surge of unplanned, unregulated and unco-ordinated international aid that came pouring into the city shortly after the first tsunami struck, destroying existing social structures. Pressures on international donors to spend money, the belief that using contractors was the most effective way to construct housing, and an over-concentration on physical reconstruction, have meant donor/aid organisations reconstructed villages according to their own specific agendas, undermining the social attitudes and structures of the surviving communities in the process.

UBA took on the challenge of helping these communities reassert their independence and sense of social cohesion. It began by ensuring people's basic needs were being met, then organised people so they could start making their own decisions, planning their own communities, and reconstructing their lives (in every sense) according to their needs and priorities. This "reconstruction of life" approach means UBA uses housing and infrastructure as the entry-points for building people's capacity, for their participation, for trauma-healing, and for ensuring their self-determination and independence.

Most international donors in the area avoided participatory forms of reconstruction, viewing them as slow, ineffective and of low quality. But by February 2007, UBA communities had constructed over 3,300 houses (including infrastructure), while others, such as the Canadian Red Cross, had not yet completed a single house, despite a budget of US \$300 million. The funding that poured into Banda Aceh and elsewhere did not eliminate poverty. UBA would like to see donors focus more on providing other forms of support, such as linking organisations together to allow them to share knowledge and experience.

Reconstructing Life After the Tsunami: The work of Uplink Banda Aceh in Indonesia

Ade Syukrizal, Wardah Hafidz, and Gabriela Sauter

Introduction

On December 26, 2004 an earthquake with an estimated seismic magnitude of 9.1-9.3 on the Richter scale caused a tsunami that claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands, destroyed villages and urban centres and affected livelihoods in many countries along the Indian Ocean, including Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka and India (Lay *et al.*, 2005). The city district of Banda Aceh, on the western tip of Indonesia in the Indian Ocean, was the city nearest to the earthquake's epicentre and was struck by a tsunami the height of a palm tree. In some of its *kampung*s (traditional villages), the survival rate was only 10%.

The tsunami altered (and for the most part destroyed) the physical dimensions of Banda Aceh and its neighbouring villages—from houses, to landscape, infrastructure, hospitals, schools, and mosques. But in the words of Wardah Hafidz, director of the Urban Poor Consortium (UPC), "*Banda Aceh is a story of two tsunamis*". The second tsunami relates to the destruction of social structures that entailed from the surge of unplanned, unregulated, and unco-ordinated international aid that came pouring into the city shortly after the first tsunami struck. Pressures on international donors to spend money, the belief that using contractors was the most effective way to construct housing, and an over-concentration on physical reconstruction, have meant donor/aid organisations reconstructed villages according to their own specific agendas, fundamentally changing the social attitudes and structures of the surviving communities in the process.

The emergence of Uplink Banda Aceh

In addition to the challenges described above, for safety reasons the government tried to enforce a 2-km no-build zone between the coast and new settlements against the wishes of the former coastal communities. It was this that gave Uplink (Box 1) its impetus to form a Banda Aceh chapter, and provided an entry point for the organisation

to facilitate the rebuilding of communities.¹ Uplink Banda Aceh (UBA) was established shortly after the tsunami and took up the challenging task of seeking to reassert these communities' independence and sense of social cohesion. It began by ensuring people's basic needs were being met, then collected data on the survivors and organised people so they could start making their own decisions, planning their own communities, and reconstructing their lives (in every sense) according to their own needs and priorities. This "reconstruction of life" approach means UBA does not take the physical aspects of development as a goal; instead creating housing and infrastructure is the entry-point for building people's capacity, for their participation, for trauma-healing, and for ensuring their self-determination and independence.

BOX 1. THE WORK OF UPLINK

UBA is part of Uplink, a 14-city network or coalition of Indonesian NGOs and CBOs that focuses its initiatives and concerns on urban poor issues.

Uplink envisages a city for all where economic, social and cultural diversity is a source of richness and strength, and the poor can live a dignified life and uphold their basic rights, including rights to determine the future of their selves and their community. The mission of Uplink is grassroots empowerment through advocacy, organising and networking. The backbone of the coalition is the grassroots groups, and the NGOs are the animators or facilitators. Annual national meetings involve all members and are used to conduct the end of year evaluation and to plan for the the coming year. Activities in each region are co-ordinated by a focal point, and the overall national co-ordination is a national secretariat.

Source: Uplink's website: <http://uplink.or.id/homes/en/node/43> [accessed August 8, 2008].

UBA's goal is to develop a people-driven post-disaster reconstruction model. It seeks to demonstrate that the priority must not be how to spend the money (as quickly as possible) or physical reconstruction, but should be the interests of the people and their welfare. Reconstruction is about lives, not just houses, and can be an opportunity—especially where international funding is significant—to deal with underlying/previous poverty and environmental problems and to improve the lives of low-income communities without creating a dependency on external organisations. For this reason, UBA did not want to establish itself as a permanent entity in Banda Aceh, but to help develop communities' ability to rebuild their own communities, not only physically, but also socially and politically, so that they have the capacity and strength to determine their future and to advocate/negotiate on their own behalf.

The Banda Aceh secretariat is co-ordinated by Abdul Jalil² and has eight staff members, including community organisers (COs), financial officers, office staff, a logistics manager and a technical advisor (who now spends most of his time on Nasi Island where the

1. Uplink Banda Aceh 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 Banda Aceh, 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); *Uplink Porong: Supporting community-driven responses to the mud volcano disaster in Sidoarjo, Indonesia* (Mujtaba Hamdi, Wardah Hafidz, and Gabriela Sauter, *Gatekeeper* 137j); 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).

2. Editor's note: since writing this paper, Abdul Jalil has been replaced by Ade Syukrizal as co-ordinator.

reconstruction is still taking place, see Box 2). The team members meet weekly to discuss emerging issues, as well as bigger concerns that may affect the poor in Indonesia, such as increasing oil and food prices. The number of staff in UBA has fallen, as work has gradually lessened after the completion of the reconstruction phase. The UBA's belief that reconstruction should be a community-driven process has meant its role in post-disaster reconstruction was very much a facilitative one, helping in the creation of working groups for reconstruction, and providing communities with technical and logistical support (architecture, engineering, water and sanitation). Much of what makes UBA unique, particularly in Aceh, is its focus on community development, as described in the next section.

Main activities

UBA's main activities involve three phases: emergency response, integrated reconstruction and community development. Although these followed in sequence, they are by no means separate and are to a large extent overlapping, particularly with the reconstruction and community development phases.

Phase 1: emergency response

The emergency response phase lasted three months, from January to March 2005. This phase was particularly interesting because many organisations/groups who would not otherwise work together found common ground in responding to the tsunami's aftermath. Conflict between the Aceh Independence Movement and government quickly came to a halt in order to deal with the emergency and demonstrate their capacity to work together in order to attract foreign help.³ Many local and international organisations, donor agencies, international NGOs and charities were involved in providing emergency relief to tsunami survivors, from health care (physical and psychological), to temporary shelter, food supplies, debris removal, the collection of bodies etc. Much of the emergency response effort in Banda Aceh was relatively well co-ordinated among organisations, but this was not the case for the reconstruction phase.

Phase 2: reconstruction

With the initial emergency relief completed, the next step was to start the reconstruction process. For UBA, reconstruction was not only about rebuilding houses, but also involved integrated reconstruction, dealing with every aspect of villagers' lives. At this point, UBA proposed that NGOs active in the area should co-ordinate their efforts. This proved unsuccessful as the various NGOs, donors, and aid agencies each had their own visions for reconstruction, often resulting in two similar programmes by different organisations in the same village. There could be up to 10 NGOs working in one village simultaneously, or families might acquire two houses from different organisations, while others were left with nothing. International organisations working on disaster response were under pressure from their head offices or from their funders to spend money, and given the fact that people needed immediate and significant help, they began their work as quickly as possible.

3. Prior to the tsunami, Banda Aceh was considered a no-go area for both Indonesians and foreigners given the movement's violence.

Although UBA was unable to get the necessary co-ordination with these other organisations, it did help to establish *Jaringan Udeep Beusaree* (JUB) (The Village Solidarity Network) in March 2005, which brought together 13 villages (however, this union was not formalised until November 2006). It also began collecting information, with the help of JUB members in different villages, on, for instance, the villages' demographics, former land plots and sources of employment. With this information, it was able to organise the communities in their reconstruction process and determine the eligibility of each family, according to their previous houses and land plots. Each village's team then joined those of other communities for construction, information gathering (on survivors), and mapping. By May 2005, the network had grown to 23 villages, and delegates from each village discussed housing types and how to build.

The national government, which took charge immediately after the earthquake because of the death of many local government officials, sought to create a 2 km construction-free zone along the coast. One of Uplink's first initiatives after the emergency response phase was to oppose this. The construction-free zone would involve establishing communities far from their original communities and source of livelihood (i.e. fishing), and there was no guarantee that this land would not later be appropriated by the government or private sector for large-scale developments (i.e. for tourism, or a port). Nilawati, a community member from Ulee Lheue village located directly on the coast, explains: "We waited a couple of months for help, but because of the policy of the 2km construction-free zone, no NGOs dared to build here. But then we saw that Uplink was working with 14 villages [within this zone] and joined them so that we could stay and rebuild here".

UBA and JUB together made plans to develop their communities as ecovillages (Figure 1), known as *Gampoeng Loen Sayang*. They defined an ecovillage as:

Urban or rural communities of people, who strive to integrate a supportive social environment with a low-impact way of life. To achieve this, they integrate various aspects of ecological design, permaculture, ecological building, green production, alternative energy, community building practices and much more. Gampoeng Loen Sayang are now being created intentionally, so people can once more live in communities that are connected to the Earth in a way that ensures the well-being of all life-forms into the indefinite future. (UPLINK, 2007)

They submitted their views on how reconstruction should take place to government, and as an alternative to the government's 2km construction-free plans. The people-driven reconstruction design was accepted by government and the plans for a 2km construction-free zone were dropped. Unfortunately, this eco-village design was not made mandatory by government, and was thus not implemented by communities outside the JUB, nor to its full extent in all JUB villages. In some of the latter villages, for example, only parts of the Gampoeng Loen Sayang were being implemented, such as escape hills and tree plantings.

Community leaders were not always the *Geuchik* (village head), but also included other active community members. The construction teams from each village were responsible for co-ordinating both UBA and the communities. Distribution of materials occurred through a card system, where each family was given a card stating the type and quantity of materials needed, which they would take to the supplier to collect.

In the first phase of construction, only one house per village was constructed. Although this may have been perceived by international funders as an unnecessary delay in construction, it meant communities were able to see their future houses, and make changes to the design. The rest of the houses were also built in phases, depending on the community's co-ordination and abilities in construction. The reconstruction process in Banda Aceh had been largely completed by February 2007, with over 3,300 houses built by community members, and is still continuing on neighbouring Pulo Nasi (Nasi Island), as described in Box 2.

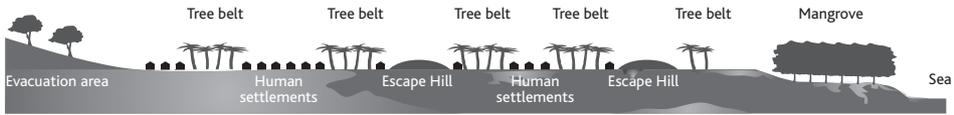
BOX 2. UPLINK ON PULO NASI (NASI ISLAND)

After the reconstruction was completed in Banda Aceh, Uplink had not envisaged working in construction in other tsunami-affected areas, but instead planned on developing and strengthening the communities it had been working with over the previous two years. However, UBA was approached by residents from three communities on neighbouring Nasi Island, whose houses were also destroyed by the tsunami. It agreed to help them. Here, UBA's work began later than many other organisations, and was thus only involved in the reconstruction phase. UBA sought funding from the British Red Cross, which helped with the preliminary design. The project was then handed over to the Australian Red Cross. The contract was not signed by UBA until April 2007 because the Australian Red Cross refused to see UBA as a partner rather than a contractor. As a contractor, UBA would receive funds as work progressed, but as a partner they would acquire an initial third of the funding in order to begin the project. Although the Australian Red Cross continues to view UBA as a contractor, UBA accepted the contract in order to begin helping the community rebuild their villages as quickly as possible. To do so, it had to draw on its own funds dedicated for Banda Aceh, affecting the continuity of the reconstruction process on Pulo Nasi and delaying its progress. The Australian Red Cross wanted to provide 45m² houses rather than the original 36m² houses. The cost of each house in Pulo Nasi (IDR 100 million or US \$11,000) was thus twice that in Banda Aceh (IDR 40 and 50 million or US \$ 4,400 and 5,500). Initially, community members applied for 300 houses, but after careful checking, 253 were accepted because many people were trying to acquire two houses under different names (i.e. both the husband and wife applying with the wife using her maiden name).

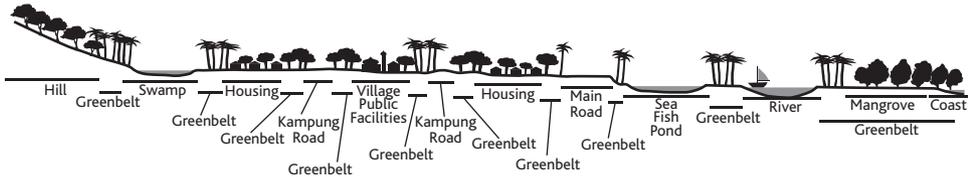
Uplink's work on Pulo Nasi began at a very late stage in the island's redevelopment. The island had received significant support (mostly financial but also in the form of infrastructure and training) from a large number of NGOs, and community solidarity appeared to be very weak. UBA works with its team members on Nasi Island, but they are separate, in terms of funding, partners, and construction specifications. Staff include 6 technical advisors, 2 logistics managers, 2 information collectors, 1 community organiser, and 12 warehouse workers. The responsibilities of the community organiser, Suddirman, include facilitating communication between the community members and Uplink, explaining how to make earthquake-safe housing and co-ordinating staff for the livelihoods programme (cash grants for business start-up). He often spends a substantial amount of time dealing with social problems: *"We were a year late on Pulo Nasi. They have already received too much money too easily, and have no desire to organise themselves, build social cohesion, join the JUB network. In Banda Aceh, Uplink was with the community from the beginning and could guide them. But here they have been working with donors who work in very different ways to us, even giving money to families for cleaning their own houses after construction!"*

Given their strong spirit of collaboration, JUB and UBA were able to work with other organisations, such as Greenpeace for solar energy cells (for streetlights); a local sanita-

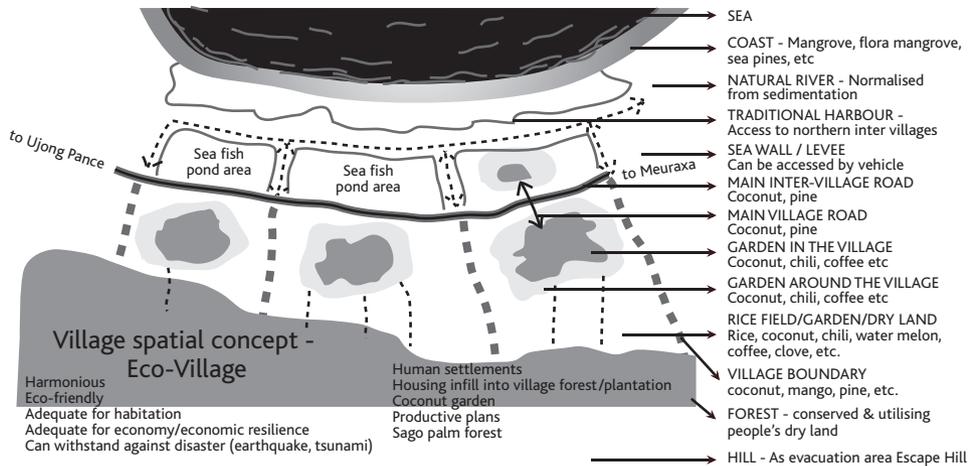
FIGURE 1. COMMUNITY ECO-VILLAGE DESIGN



The coastal communities in Aceh are showing the people's way...



Government consent to people's alternative policy:
safety and security measures are more sustainable



tion NGO for sanitation infrastructure expertise; Bumoe Leuser, another local NGO, for documentation and helping to develop the community database; and the International Labour Organisation for basic construction training for residents.

Phase 3: Community development

The third, final, and ongoing phase of UBA's work in Banda Aceh is community development. This overlaps significantly with the reconstruction phase, as it is about integrated reconstruction: the development of communities in every sense, from the physical to the environmental, social, economic, and political. The purpose of this final phase is to ensure the autonomy of the JUB network so that it can operate independently and self-sufficiently when UBA shifts its focus elsewhere. UBA seeks to accomplish this through the development and strengthening of JUB by facilitating meetings and supporting its various initiatives. UBA's capacity-building approach sets it apart from many organisations that have been working in Banda Aceh and its surroundings following the tsunami. Many of these arrive, build houses and infrastructure, provide cash grants for income generation activities, sometimes provide training in handicrafts, and then leave. This form of aid breeds dependency, and its short-term nature means communities are left with little more than a handful of material possessions without sufficient capacity to develop further, both in terms of construction and social development.

The "two tsunamis" have affected all aspects of communities' lives: the destruction caused by the tsunami coupled with the social, economic and environmental implications of the extensive and unregulated surge of international money. Prior to the tsunami, most of the villagers were involved in fishing, farming, trading and processing coffee. Since the tsunami, many are now afraid to go out to sea to fish, and significant areas of farmland are still damaged by the saltwater. Many are still working in the construction industry, rebuilding houses, streets, drainage, etc., particularly since many NGOs are still in the process of constructing houses (with some only just starting).

Most of UBA and JUB's programmes have been ongoing since the construction phase, yet they continue today despite the completion of housing, in order to ensure communities remain strong and continue to work together. These programmes include:

- *Arpillera*: Chilean quilt work that tells a story in its design from the creator's perspective, and has been used as a form of art therapy around the world. Three members of JUB's women's division received *arpillera* training from two Chilean women who came to Aceh to teach this form of art. Yus Nidari, with two other community members, Rohani and Isannor says: "*With this... we can have something positive to do and forget the trauma we experienced from the tsunami because we have something to keep us busy. We feel better now, because we can allow our anger and sadness to escape in the arpillera, we can express our feelings through a different medium.... It has brought us closer together and now we are closer to women from other villages too.*"
- Alternative medicine, including acupuncture and acupressure. Villagers were trained by a team of Uplink members from around the country.

- Mushroom cultivation, composting, active micro-organism liquid fertiliser production. This is part of the eco-village programme, and community members were trained in different JUB villages on recycling their waste, using their compost for cultivation and making liquid fertiliser from fermented fruit juices to naturally enhance their soil. UBA is also looking into introducing eco-friendly technologies like biogas generators. With the help of UBA and its national network, JUB was able to learn from community members in Surabaya (see *Gatekeeper* 137h) about composting and making effective micro-organism (an organic fertiliser); Surabayans learned to make blocks from the production units in Aceh. Such exchange programmes meant community members from Aceh and elsewhere were able to learn from successful practices and broaden their impact to a larger scale, both within Indonesia, and abroad.
- Advocacy training. During the reconstruction process, many poverty-related issues were raised by community members. For example, local government is now trying to evict the market from central Banda Aceh, and is renewing calls to implement the 2km construction-free zone, despite the fact that the communities have already been rebuilt. UBA works with local communities in providing and collecting relevant information on such issues so they can organise to fight eviction threats. At a larger scale, UBA is involved in uniting JUB communities with other organisations (including NGOs, labour unions, religious groups, rickshaw unions and local political parties) in a national campaign against oil price rises and to oppose the international corporations exploiting Indonesia's natural resources to the detriment of local communities and the nation's environment. According to the UBA co-ordinator, Jalil:

We are educating communities about being critical of government policy and macro-political issues that affect them directly. With these grassroots communities, we organise them and hope that the separate communities can build a network with others, like the rickshaw communities in Banda Aceh and JUB.

- Livelihoods programme. This programme is directly related to the gender analysis programme (see below). Together with JUB, UBA sought to understand people's main sources of income pre-tsunami, to determine which training/livelihoods programmes would be suitable for them. This programme is still under development and there are two people in each village documenting the work of their communities, and meeting at least once a month to update each other on progress. For the implementation of these programmes, UBA has asked various experts to support the training process. For example: agricultural experts can show how to manage land, use new technologies that can help increase productivity, how to rehabilitate farmland and identify which crops/plants would grow best in areas affected by saltwater. UBA also plans to encourage the formation of fishing co-operatives to strengthen fisherfolks' price negotiations with retailers. At present, they sell their fish individually and incomes depend upon retailers' price decisions, leaving them vulnerable and disempowered. Since each village has its own strengths and main income generating activities, each will have livelihood programmes tailored to these. The villages can then exchange resources, fulfill their own needs, and can sell any surplus outside the JUB area. As part of the livelihoods programme, JUB is trying to involve more women in farming.

- Gender analysis. This programme is also under development. UBA aims to better understand the gender relations in Banda Aceh, and has recommended to JUB members that their future initiatives should be more gender-sensitive:
 - JUB needs to develop programmes that involve both men and women, not one or the other, particularly in livelihood programmes. In this way, men and women work together without creating further division between the sexes.
 - JUB needs to develop ‘woman-friendly’ approaches to its programmes—for instance, by changing the ways in which men carry out their daily work, women can be incorporated in this process. Currently, fishermen sell their fish to middle-men who then sell at the fish market. More work can be brought to the home through fresh-water fishing, or by including women in, for instance, processing the fish and selling it themselves, providing economic and social benefits for the entire family.
 - JUB needs to encourage men to involve themselves in household activities. Research carried out by UBA reveals that many men have a tendency to spend significant amounts of their time in coffee shops, while their wives do the domestic work. Since the culture in Aceh is very patriarchal, men are considered the head of the household and often make family decisions. This culture is then fortified by the local interpretation of Islam, which has changed little to adapt to contemporary times. UBA has suggested that more men should get involved in reproductive activities, rather than only productive activities (selling, fishing, farming, etc), and has invited a very respected religious leader (*Ulama*) who is also involved in the National Commission for Women’s Rights, to give them a more contemporary interpretation of the Koran’s verses. UBA and JUB also encourage women to take part in every community meeting and to be involved in community decision-making to reverse the tendency for men to dominate. To date, there has been a positive response from some men, but UBA suggests that *“we don’t know yet if this has changed anything because we are still trying to give them an understanding of this gender issue.”*
- Strengthening and supporting JUB (see below). UBA supports JUB in many ways—for instance attending JUB community meetings, helping facilitate meetings/negotiations, helping establish working programmes and suggesting ways forward. UBA focuses on helping JUB link with social, political and economic aspects of development to build its social identity and strengthen the holistic development of communities. Currently, two COs are engaged in strengthening the network so that when UBA ceases to exist, JUB can sustain itself. Although JUB’s scope covers 23 villages, it has yet to involve all the community members, and UBA is aiming to make the network more grassroots and inclusive, although this has been a challenge since the construction process has been completed in these villages.

The role of JUB

JUB elected a co-ordinator (from three candidates), and with support from UBA has established five main working groups, including: livelihoods; women and children; arts, culture and sport; micro-finance; and health. Many of JUB’s activities involve support to social events, bringing communities together and rebuilding relations where they have

become strained during the reconstruction process (Box 3). On religious holidays, the 23 villages come together to pray and celebrate. JUB's Arts, Culture and Sport Group is currently organising a volleyball tournament for its 23 villages. COs from UBA hope that through this tournament, people who are not necessarily involved in JUB activities can learn about its other programmes and become more active in the network.

Yus, Rohani and Insannor are part of JUB's Women and Children division. They explain that they received training from a number of organisations, including UBA (e.g. in *arpillera*), Red Cross and World Vision in different handicrafts; the JUB network meant they were able to transfer their knowledge to women across different villages, particularly in their sub-district. Every Tuesday, JUB members from their sub-district meet to discuss activities and how to market their products, where to find funding, and plan for the future. They also talk about issues that arise in groups (a sewing group, baking group, and cattle herding group) that existed prior to the JUB and that are important for the women of that area. Nilawati from Ulee Lheue explains:

"Now that the houses have been built, we are not so close, but we hold meetings every once in a while when we have specific issues to discuss. But before the tsunami, we didn't know the other villages, we were not involved in decision-making. But now we know each other, and JUB encourages women to take part in meetings and decision-making and won't even start meetings until women are present! I can see now that women are not only to work in the kitchen, but we are more than that!"

BOX 3: RECONSTRUCTING COMMUNITY VALUES: LAM RUKAN VILLAGE

Mr Ridwan Husen, a survivor from Lam Rukam village, first came to know of UBA through one of its COs in February 2005. Uplink held a meeting to discuss the village's future plans in Lam Rukam village with survivors, who, at that time, were staying in the refugee camp further inland. Given the 2km no-build zone policy plan, NGOs were very hesitant to reconstruct villages which were near the coast. Uplink, however, advocated on the coastal communities' behalf, organised villages to come together to protest against this regulation, and provided them with temporary shelter and food/cooking supplies (since government only provided food to those who stayed in refugee camps) to help them to start rebuilding their communities. In Lam Rukam, as in other UBA villages, the community formed various teams (e.g. logistics, construction), consisting mostly of men, while the women and children remained in refugee camps, and once JUB was formed, these united to work together. Mr Husen explains:

"By working together in the construction process, we feel we were building better bonds between villages. To co-ordinate with other NGOs and to strengthen this bond, we decided to formalise the network. I feel now we are more solid as a community and with other villages and have less friction than we used to because of JUB and UBA. Other NGOs give a lot of cash grants that cause clashes among villages, where some get the grants and others don't. After most of these NGOs left, communities' values were changed, and whenever a new programme starts with a new NGO, the first question is always: 'will we get paid?' UBA avoided this because it just makes us more dependent. Instead it helped us with training and linking with other villages through JUB. Now we have new knowledge from Uplink and we can be more independent. So if we need fertiliser, we can make it instead of buying it. If we want to expand our houses, we can do it ourselves, and if we want to make sure it's safe, we know how."

UBA also helped establish an alternative health programme in JUB. Nurmala, a community member from Lam Jame who lost three children and her husband in the tsunami tells of its impact:

"When I got back from the refugee camp... I heard of the alternative health programme from my friend Yus, so I asked to join. I needed something to do, to keep busy because I was getting depressed. At first, I felt I was relieving stress and refreshing myself, then as I got more knowledge of alternative health, I didn't have to go to the doctor and could deal with things myself. I became more confident and trained people in other villages. I practice not only for my family [herself and her two remaining children] but for others too and we don't have to rely on doctors anymore. By now I don't train anymore because there are trainees in every JUB village!"

Nurmala's late arrival from the refugee camp meant she was not able to get a UBA house, but *"even though I didn't get an Uplink house, I got some knowledge that is useful and I am happy with that. I also made a lot of friends in the process."* She adds: *"JUB is important because it was born out of shared needs, not to get evicted. So now we share a strong sense of togetherness".*

Funding

UBA's funding is generally provided through the national Uplink secretariat in Jakarta.³ The main donors are Misereor, Development and Peace, and Plan International. Finding the finances for housing reconstruction was not an issue for UBA, as funds were quickly made available by hundreds of foreign donors after the tsunami, although primarily for reconstruction work. The donors noted above had been working with other Uplink secretariats across Indonesia so could build on an already existing positive working relationship. UBA's funding between January 2005 and February 2007 for housing, roads and drainage, one community centre and one mosque per village came to over IDR 200 billion (US \$22 million). It is difficult to determine the exact annual budget, as funding was allocated according to projects, not timescales. Currently, UBA applies for funding when needed, and sometimes provides loans to the Pulo Nasi reconstruction programme when its funds run low (the funding provided by the donor is based on separate 'stages' of reconstruction, which has often hindered the continuity of reconstruction). UBA is now also preparing a funding proposal for JUB to support its social activities and administrative costs, and establish a JUB office.

UBA tries to avoid being dictated to by donors and their associated conditions by accepting funds from organisations with which it has worked in the past, or those who do not impose conditions on how funds can be spent. UBA is currently looking into ways of making itself more financially independent.

4. Every six months, the UBA chapter drafts a proposal for the funds needed for the next half year. This proposal is brought to the national Uplink meeting and the proposals from all 14 chapters are then amalgamated into one proposal for the entire Uplink network (14 chapters) and funds are allocated according to specific needs.

Constraints for effectiveness and scaling-up

Poor NGO co-ordination

There was a serious lack of co-ordination between NGOs, and too much focus on physical reconstruction, despite UBA's efforts. For example, in one fishing village three different NGOs each provided new fishing boats. This meant many boats were not used, while other villages got no boats at all. This poor co-ordination, overlap and over-supply of programmes in some villages reduced the effectiveness of donor funding and prompted the local population to try to take whatever they could from these donors.

The local government was severely weakened due to the tsunami, with many of its staff killed. Banda Aceh had to wait for two months after the tsunami for the national government to step in and make decisions about international aid and reconstruction. But these decisions failed to address co-ordination among NGOs and ensure that their various specialities and foci complemented each other. The national government did establish the BRR, a reconstruction and rehabilitation committee for co-ordinating NGOs, charities, donors, and aid agencies in Banda Aceh. Each organisation was supposed to report to the BRR and attend meetings (regarding progress and problems), but this did not happen. Most NGOs had already begun constructing houses following their own standards, leaving little room for the BRR to set a unified standard.

Over-emphasis on physical reconstruction

Most of the external aid was construction-related, as many donors were under pressure to spend their money quickly and provide tangible results that could be broadcast in their home countries. The problem with focusing solely on physical reconstruction is that when the building is finished and the donors withdraw, many communities are left without a source of income, social cohesion or support for the future, undermining long-term sustainability and funding effectiveness. There is also an unspoken sense of competition among aid organisations in trying to get recognition for their aid—for instance promoting their achievements or hanging up banners that read *"From the People of America"*.

Undermining community values

By treating affected persons as victims rather than survivors, external organisations generate dependency and local communities also begin seeing themselves as recipients and helpless sufferers. The presence in Aceh for over three years of organisations willing to flood local communities with cash undermined the ability of many communities to determine their own outcomes and develop themselves independently. This sense of powerlessness also encouraged communities to take all that they could and to see externally-provided funds/aid as their right.

In March 2005, Oxfam introduced a cash-for-work policy for activities such as street cleaning and house cleaning after construction and attending community meetings. UBA's approach is rather different, as it believes cleaning one's house is an ordinary, daily

activity that should not be paid for. Many of these programmes have been copied by other organisations, but without proper monitoring, leading to significant corruption and changing people's approach to community reconstruction. Before the tsunami, there was a sense of community and togetherness, and since such programmes have been established, the primary concern for communities has been whether or not they would be paid for developing their community. This has had a lasting effect on the Banda Aceh communities, and now, for example, when JUB holds a meeting, many community members ask for payment to attend because in the reconstruction period, this was many NGOs' policy. These programmes have fundamentally altered people's community values and have indirectly (and inadvertently) promoted self-interest and segregation, making it more difficult for organisations like UBA who are trying to promote team-work and community development. UBA has tried to deal with this issue by establishing similar (although very limited) cash grant programmes. The difference, however, is that UBA only makes such funds available on the condition that they are for income generation schemes (and they are mostly given to groups, not individuals). In addition, the groups have to submit a proposal stating how the money would be used and they have to discuss the realities of their investments with UBA, as well as their ideas for making their businesses work.

Undermining environmental sustainability

UBA and JUB's intention to create eco-villages has also been undermined by the activities of international donors—for instance their use of large sports utility vehicles, the growing use of motorcycles funded by donors' cash grant programmes, the large NGO offices with air conditioning and new computers. Not only have UBA's attempts to reconstruct the communities in an environmentally-friendly manner been offset by the practices of these external organisations, they have also been strongly influenced by the growing trend of motorcycle ownership.

The use of contractors

Many international donors thought that hiring professional contractors was the most efficient way to get things done quickly. They saw more participatory forms of reconstruction as slow, ineffective and of low quality. But by February 2007, UBA/JUB communities had constructed over 3,300 houses (including infrastructure), while others, such as the Canadian Red Cross, had not yet completed a single house, despite a budget of US \$300 million (only US \$100 million had been spent by early 2008).⁵ After the tsunami, Banda Aceh became an aid destination for over 500 international organisations, bringing in a total of approximately US \$12 billion. Those who benefited most from this inflow of cash were not the tsunami survivors, but contractors, architects and engineers (from outside Aceh) who were commissioned for work by these international agencies. Many contractors took the money and left without actually doing the work for which they had been contracted. Contractors had subcontractors who had subcontractors,

5. See CBC News: Correspondent. 2006. 'A house to call home', CBC News, available online: <http://www.cbc.ca/correspondent/060323.html> [Accessed August 08, 2008].

making it very difficult to track how funding was used. With each sub-contract, the quality of the housing would be reduced to generate more profits.

UBA has not been pressurised by its donors to deliver faster in Banda Aceh: according to the Co-ordinator of UBA, Mr Jalil, *"We put ourselves as equals with donors so we work as partners. Nasi Island is a different case because when they asked us to help, we said yes, despite the fact we didn't have a donor (Box 2). The British [and later the Australian] Red Cross agreed to fund, but would only see us as a contractor. In Banda Aceh, the relationship was more balanced because we were considered partners"*. This is important.

Government perceptions

UBA's drive for integrated reconstruction places more emphasis on the social than the physical aspects. But government officials (district councillors) have yet to understand UBA's approach; they judge effectiveness by the number of houses built and how much money has been made available by the organisation for reconstruction. Their language is money, not social cohesion, solidarity, sustainability, eco-development or integrated development, and they have difficulty in accepting the validity of UBA's work.

Furthermore, the government put forward a series of regulations about reconstruction that were unsympathetic towards the communities and their livelihoods, lifestyles and connection to the sea. These included a plan to permanently move communities into a "safety zone" 40km from the coast in three "modern cities", followed by declaring a 2km no-construction zone. It sought to convince local populations that their former villages were unsafe, contaminated by chemicals released in the earthquake, and that another tsunami could hit at any time. After lobbying by community members, JUB and UBA, the government accepted the JUB eco-village concept which incorporated plans for buffer zones and evacuation hills. However, this design remains optional.

Construction difficulties

UBA also experienced some technical difficulties in rebuilding houses and communities. The BRR's inability to set and control standard prices for building materials meant that prices for cement, wood, steel and other materials increased very rapidly, driven by speculation. A logging ban in Aceh (an important and much-needed policy) has not stopped illegal logging in the area because corruption remained unchecked. The over-concentration on construction, especially for concrete houses, triggered environmental destruction through, for instance, mining of stone in hills and mountains. UBA tried to prevent this in their hilly areas, but with little success because the BRR was unable to impose regulations strictly.

There is a growing trend towards concrete houses in Aceh, in part because of their "modern" image and perceived strength, and in part due to external influence (by other NGOs). Most villagers have chosen to build concrete houses at ground level. UBA has struggled with providing what the villagers wanted (at least initially), and ensuring that houses remain environmentally-friendly and traditional to the area (stilt houses). Stilt houses have many advantages; for example, fishermen value the space underneath for storing their tools, nets, fish, etc. But UBA had trouble convincing people of their advan-

tages. When the stilt houses were completed, however, many people who had built ground-level houses regretted their decision.

Conclusions

According to Mr Jalil, UBA has developed a strong relationship with community members: *“Uplink does not have any set, formal working hours or working days, we’re like a Kmart, 24/7 so community members can visit our office any time and don’t have to make an appointment first”*. By getting involved with communities at an early stage, it has managed to build their trust and work together towards empowering them. UBA has established a set of five main criteria to determine whether its aim to empower communities has been achieved. This means ensuring the communities:

1. Have access to welfare.
2. Have access to resources.
3. Are conscientised and politically aware.
4. Participate in decision-making (with government, across genders, and in both domestic and public domains).
5. Have the power to determine the interests and future of their community.

The Co-ordinator explains why Uplink is important for the community: *“We feel it is important to have Uplink because there is injustice in society...And because of that the people don’t have access to resources, and have no control over the government policies that affect them. So Uplink is here because the five criteria are not being fulfilled. And JUB is one of the ways to achieve these five aspects of empowerment – it is like a tool, a medium to fulfill these criteria, because it is for the people’s benefit, according to what they feel is important for them. They have a common goal, their own goal, not someone else’s.”*

Whilst the over-availability of money and international aid has made integrated reconstruction a very difficult task in Aceh, UBA’s other programmes have proved more difficult to fund, in particular JUB’s activities. JUB has had no access to funding except via UBA. Donors have a long history of working together with Uplink and are more comfortable providing funds through UBA than directly through JUB, with whom they have no working relationship. Mr Jalil suggests: *“It’s better for a new organisation like JUB to have a minimal fund to keep the principles at the core and not the money.”* It is this issue that we wish to highlight in this case study. The funding that poured into Banda Aceh and elsewhere did not eliminate poverty. We would like to see donors focus more on providing other forms of support, such as linking organisations together to allow them to share knowledge and experience. In Aceh, for example, Misereor put UBA in touch with a Gujarati team (in India) that worked on earthquake-resistant housing after the 2001 earthquake. The team travelled to Aceh to provide advice and assistance in designing UBA’s earthquake resistant house models (for which there was a choice of three stilt and two ground-level houses). This kind of support can be very useful, and needs to be better understood by donors.

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