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Natural Resources and Conflict in Papua, Sulawesi and Maluku, Indonesia

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Indonesia continues to be affected by a range of low-level conflicts. Occasional flare-ups of communal violence, ongoing counter-insurgency campaigns, and the loss of indigenous resource rights have all contributed to a growing internally displaced population. These factors often act in unison, undermining communities' economic and agricultural systems. The end result has been an increase in poverty within communities that have witnessed conflict.

This project aims to support conflict-affected communities to re-establish their economic and agricultural activities by engaging them in sustainable livelihoods trainings, conflict resolution over resource rights, and building regional (provincial) capacities within the local NGO networks. This addresses the key barriers to a quick recovery in the post conflict period, by involving all members of the community (displaced people, hosts communities, returnees and migrants) and taking advantage of the post conflict situation to encourage an environmentally sustainable approach to community development and rehabilitation.

Central Sulawesi, particularly the district of Poso, has witnessed intermittent clashes between Christian and Muslim groups since the transmigration of Muslim and Hindu settlers into the region began in the 1970s. Over the past five years militias have emerged on both sides escalating the conflict, drawing local residents into the battles, which at their peak came to resemble district-wide rioting. During this period the violence claimed an estimated 2,000 lives and displaced over 100,000 people. Despite polarisation along religious lines during the conflict, it is generally accepted that the roots of this conflict lie not in religious differences but that it is the result of a power struggle between local elites and security forces. While the violence occurred mostly along religious lines, most in the area feel that the real issue is competition for land and resources which has been aggravated by three factors 1) increased migration of settlers from Java and Bali has heightened competition for farmland, which in turn has forced indigenous communities to encroach on forested areas and convert them to small-scale plantation farms, 2) rapid environmental destruction through deforestation and 3) an increased interest in the province on behalf of a number of international resource extraction enterprises.

Papua continues to face multiple risks of conflict between the various indigenous communities, the state security forces and a growing migrant community. Extreme poverty, the unresolved history of Papua's incorporation into Indonesia, the destruction of the local environment, and the deterioration of local cultures have fed frustrations within the indigenous community. Aggravating this, the Indonesian security forces treat local expressions of culture and community as separatist acts, to which they often react with violence. The ongoing provincial political reforms, risk reinforcing ideological, cultural and economic divisions that could spillover into communal violence as local elites and politicians seek to consolidate their power bases.

The Maluku islands have been engulfed in communal violence for a most of the past three years since a quarrel between a Christian and a Muslim at an Ambon bus terminal erupted into a virtual civil war. It is estimated that up to 2003 over 5000 people had been killed and over 700,000 (almost a third of the region's population) had been displaced. Similar to Papua and Sulawesi, a combination of competition over resources, increase migration and the increase activity of major resource extraction industries has increased tensions in the area. Again in March 2004 violence broke out in Ambon, and since then local leaders have been struggling to rebuild the peace-pacts developed in the preceding years and re-settle the victims of the most recent round of violence.