

# Probing into Gradiasi: lambung as a Medium for the Management of Movement Knowledge

Maulida Raviola

## Introduction

*"Actually, the conditions that we (the diffable) are experiencing are the impact of development, in which we have not been provided space because we are considered unproductive. Development is like an aircraft carrier where inside it we (the diffable) cannot move. The question to the diffable organizations and activists then is: where are we going to position ourselves in this system?"*<sup>1</sup>

Knowledge management is an inseparable part of social movements. From a number of references on knowledge management, one understanding that can be used is knowledge as "the capacity for action," in which there are a series of efforts to collect facts, methods, principles, and techniques as the basis for achieving goals. In this sense, it is fair to say that without knowledge as a common basis, a movement will not have sufficient power or capacity to achieve its goals. Therefore, knowledge management that is carried out collectively as the basis of the movement,<sup>2</sup> or knowledge about the movement, is a topic that is frequently explored by the actors.

In the context of the disability movement in Indonesia, one of the initiatives undertaken to manage knowledge is through the Sekolah Gerakan Advokasi Indonesia Inklusif (or Inclusive Indonesian Advocacy Movement School, hereafter referred to as Gradiasi). As a collective effort, Gradiasi is driven by diffable activists across organizations and regions to address the need for the regeneration of diffable activists and then respond to challenges regarding the lack of

discourse in the disability movement in Indonesia, especially the discourse that departs from the authentic experiences of its movers amidst the broader mainstream development and civil society movements.<sup>3</sup> Gradiasi seeks to bring together the discourse of the disability movement, which, undeniably, is highly influenced by development programs from developed countries, with "undercurrent" knowledge derived from the long experience of its cadres in mobilizing awareness of diffable people to become an organized group in encouraging the fulfillment of their rights as citizens.

This short article attempts to review the process that is gone through at Gradiasi by incorporating the concept of *lambung* as a practice of managing knowledge of the disability movement. How, in the intersection between civil society organizations and social movements, is *lambung* constructed as an attempt to gather and share knowledge? What kind of knowledge is collected and for what and whom are the efforts made? Who are the parties involved and how does knowledge negotiation occur in the process? And, more broadly, can *lambung* be a model offered for the management of knowledge about social movements in Indonesia?

## *Lambung* and Knowledge Negotiation

In the history of its development, the disability movement in Indonesia which was initiated by individuals and organizations with disabilities outside the umbrella of government control began to emerge ahead of the reform or known as *reformasi*.<sup>4</sup> The establishment of various disability collectives and organizations at that time was a form of resistance against the development paradigm that perpetuated the dichotomous way of thinking about normality/

abnormality and positioned the diffable solely as recipients of charitable government assistance programs. In the post-reform era, the awareness to manage knowledge as a foundation or blueprint for the disability movement has also strengthened, especially in the midst of the rapid flow of international aid funds for civil society organizations that was poured into Indonesia after the Aceh tsunami. As described by Bahrul Fuad, a diffable activist and member of the 2020–2024 plenary commission of National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan)<sup>5</sup>, this awareness is based on the reflection of diffable activists who feel that foreign donor programs are dominating the movement's agenda, which in turn makes the disability movement tend to be reactive rather than creative and dependent on external sources of funding.<sup>6</sup>

Efforts to develop collective knowledge through Gradiasi have been carried out since the end of 2017. The initial discussions of Gradiasi were attended by various disability organizations and organizations working on disability issues, such as Talenta (Solo), SIGAB (Yogyakarta), Dria Manunggal (Yogyakarta), SAPDA (Yogyakarta), SEHATI (Sukoharjo), PPDiS (Situbondo), PerDIK (Makassar), YAKKUM (Yogyakarta), Karina KAS (Klaten), Bahtera (East Sumba), Pattiro (Bogor), PSLD of Brawijaya University (Malang), and YASMI (Makassar). In the initial discussions of its establishment, it is interesting to see how Gradiasi has become a negotiating space in an effort to form shared knowledge. The debate over the term "inclusion," for example, which is so widely used as a development jargon nowadays, is seen as having a narrower meaning than the term "diversity" which already exists in Indonesian<sup>7</sup>. Likewise, the term "accessibility," with the connotation of independence which is considered to have a tendency to encourage the spirit of competition rather than mutual assistance which is more entrenched in the communal Indonesian society<sup>8</sup>.

In addition to the choices of terminology, the initiators of Gradiasi also discussed the extent to which the critical awareness of diffable activists needs to be built and strengthened. For some activists, the social construction of disability cannot be separated from the relations between actors in the social, political, and cultural contexts that surround them. An understanding of the social structures that marginalizes the diffable should become basic knowledge for every activist, so that a critical analytical framework can be established to be used in educating and increasing awareness of the wider community. On the other hand, the experiences of activists in the field, at

least for the last five years, show more pragmatic needs to encourage the fulfillment of the rights of the diffable, such as the ability to collect data, to access resources through regional funds, and to manage communities. Activities such as data collection, participation in village and sub-district development planning meetings, and organizing groups of the diffable in villages and sub-districts are considered as types of activities that have far more impact in promoting the welfare of the diffable. In these discussions, the debate about the weight of ideological and practical skills that needs to be accommodated in the learning curriculum became lively with the exchange of insights from diffable activists across generations, cultures, and disciplines, in an effort to develop a comprehensive knowledge structure to achieve the movement's goals.

However, among the various debates and negotiations, the regeneration of activists as the main objective of the implementation of Gradiasi is the most important consideration in deciding the kind of knowledge structure that needs to be collected and distributed, as well as the persons that need to be actively involved in facilitating the process. At the very least, knowledge needs to be developed to create cadres who can be independent in organizing communities at the local level, who are not uprooted from their communities, and are able to identify sources of strength from their social environment. In particular, women or mothers who have diffable children are mapped as potential cadres, because in a family with a member who is diffable, the mother is the most important figure in the process of the self-acceptance of the diffable. In addition, Gradiasi also mapped out grassroots disabled activists outside Java who had not been touched by the development programs that were more concentrated on the island of Java. This mapping process provides an interesting picture of how Gradiasi as a practice of *lumbung* defines the structure and scope of members and their community territories in the process of knowledge production and distribution.

Through the whole process that they had been through, the initiators of Gradiasi finally agreed on a flow of knowledge that started from an introduction to the identity of the diffable, to the history and paradigm of the diffable in the Indonesian culture, and finally to the ability of diffable people to organize communities. Knowledge of policy advocacy, disaster management, community-based rehabilitation, and data collection is provided in thematic classes to strengthen the organizational works. So clearly, the whole process of designing this Gradiasi shows how the disability issues in Indonesia

cannot be separated from the historical, cultural, economic, and political contexts from time to time, with allusions or meeting points that are so close to various other movement issues such as gender equality, labor, spatial management and environmental damage.

### **Modularization of Knowledge about Movement**

After a long series of planning discussions, Gradiasi was carried out in 2020 in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic which made face-to-face learning impossible.

However, through online learning sessions, Gradiasi was able to gather more than 116 diffable cadres and activists on the disability issues from 37 districts and cities in Indonesia. The andragogic method or approach is used to emphasize direct practice in the learning process of participants, both through community organizing and research, in responding to various problems faced by the diffable in their respective areas. Participants can choose the specific capacity they want to explore, according to their respective roles and abilities in their community. In this case, the learning session as a practice of distributing resources in *lumbung* tried to bring together knowledge with the needs and awareness of the social role of the participants, where participants as part of the learning *lumbung* community can actively adapt their abilities to the existing opportunities and challenges in their environment. —

One of the interesting things from this knowledge distribution process is the characteristic of knowledge about movement which is modular, or knowledge that can be placed according to the context of the space where the participants are located. As a result of a *lumbung* practice, this modularity provides the capacity for action which is not authoritative, but creative, for participants or community members. Even within their creative boundaries, the community members still cannot be separated from the mainstream nature of development projects that direct their actions to forms of collaboration and compromise. In these learning and post-learning processes, we can see how the participants of Gradiasi become active subjects in responding to various problems at the community level, such as the data collection process for the diffable that is not comprehensive, the weak commitment of local governments to fulfill the basic rights of people with disabilities, to the protection of diffable women and children from violence. The participants or cadres also move to organize individuals and families with diffable through a community model of self-help groups and community-based rehabilitation teams.

The concept of *lumbung* in the management of Gradiasi can also be an endeavor for a broader knowledge management practice about social movement in Indonesia. In the context of development whose ramifications are marginalization and social injustice as a common “aircraft carrier,” the commonality of the challenges faced and parallel ideas on the way

1 The question was asked by Setia Adi Purwanta, Director of Dria Manunggal, a diffable organization founded in 1991 and is located in Yogyakarta. In the 1990s, the intense discussions between Setia and Mansour Fakhri—one of the important thinkers on social movements in Indonesia, found the term “diffable” (differently able people or people who are able in a different way) as an alternative to “handicapped persons” which was widely used, which included in the Law concerning Handicapped Persons No. 4 of 1997 signed by Suharto.

2 In the first issue of *Interface*, an academic journal that specifically reviews knowledge about social movements from around the world, the journal editors Laurence Cox and Cristina Flesher Fominaya mention the term “movement knowledge,” which involves: how a movement produces knowledge, which knowledge is produced, and how that knowledge is used.

3 Cox and Fominaya (in *Interface*) see that there is a tension between civil society organizations and social movements, where civil society organizations are seen as parties that tend to encourage more “subtle” forms of political participation and mobilization to sustain the operation of neoliberalism, while social movements are more “rough” measures that allow a group to participate according to their own desires, forms, and goals.

to social transformation should open up greater opportunities for movement activists to gather knowledge about the collective movement by seeing the potential for modularity of knowledge—at least, so that it can become a movement or a large community that can imagine ways of working beyond the “push” to be reactive and fragmented. The knowledge *lumbung* can also be the first step to unite the diverse experiences and perspectives as a potential for a creative rather than divisive action.

However, as a first step, Gradiasi cannot be separated from challenges related to its sustainability. Sustainability is not only about organizing the learning session but also ensuring that the flow of knowledge can take place in a circular and reflective manner between community members and their *lumbung*, so that the *lumbung* can continue to be relevant to the communities that live them. This is an important question for the activists, perhaps also for activists of other social movements who have started their own *lumbung* initiatives in various ways: how can *lumbung* truly provide a transformative action for the movement and not stop as merely an interest group?

#### Reference

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4 Bahrul Fuad discusses the history and typology of diffable organizations in Indonesia in an article entitled “Revitalization of the Diffable Movement in Indonesia,” which was published in the 69th edition of *Jurnal Perempuan* (2011).

5 Interview with Bahrul Fuad, January 30, 2022. Bahrul Fuad was involved in the entire process of planning and implementing Gradiasi and acted as the principal of the first batch of Gradiasi schools.

6 Of course, this problem is not experienced by the disability movement only. In an article entitled “LSM-isasi Perlawanan (or NGO-ization of the Resistance),” Arundhati Roy discusses how the development projects funded by the international institutions have turned the resistance movement into a mere “work.” Although on the one hand it is undeniable that the aid funds also accelerate issues brought about by the movement, on the other hand, the capacity and the collective values that were previously lived as manifestations of self-reliance are slowly fading away.

7 Setia Adi Purwanta in the initial discussion of Gradiasi, May 2018

8 Slamet Thohari (activist of PSLD of Brawijaya University) in the initial discussion of Gradation, May 2018