

# Religious Based Approach is Required for Disaster Mitigation

Wednesday, 19 October 2016 WIB, By: Marwati



The largest human induced disaster in Indonesia occurred on 29 May 2006 when mudflows erupted to the surface in Porong, Sidoarjo, East Java. Until today, the mudflow still inundated up to 16 villages, forcing 50,000 residents to flee. In this case, the disaster sparks the fatalistic expression among the community that became the victims.

"In the structural disempowered situation of the Lapindo mudflow, the expression of surrender of the Lapindo victims to God is found many times. In the context of the victim, surrendering to God is the strategy of coping to stay strong in the structural disempowerment situation," said lecturer from IAIN Syekh Nurjati Cirebon, Fuad Faizi, in his doctoral promotion on Tuesday (18/10) in the Auditorium of UGM Graduate School.

In his dissertation, Fuad observed how religious perception determines the response in the context of mudflow recovery in terms of vulnerability and resilience. In the context of disaster, there is a difference of views related to religious fatalistic perception forms to disasters. On one hand, this is seen as causing the passive response and, in turn, will increase vulnerabilities. On the other hand, on the personal level, fatalistic belief and perception that God controls every thing is seen as beneficial as it can reduce stress and anxiety and maintains their personal functionality, particularly in a situation where there is nothing or very few doable things.

“Although fatalistic surrender would not resolve the problem of vulnerabilities in an actual way, but it can prevent the psychological effect from turning worse that will only aggravate their disempowered situation,” he said.

Different from the fatalistic theories that say that religion encourages victims to do few things to protect themselves or recover from disaster, Fuad’s research showed that the victims do anything in their power until they found that they were trapped in a dead-end and frustration. In the Lapindo mudflow case, the government is the main contributor to their vulnerabilities.

“The Indonesian government was obviously not the cause of the mudflow problem, but their unclear response had created a deadlock that weakened the victims and the people living in vulnerable areas. It comes as no surprise that the victims then turned to God,” said Fuad.

Fuad emphasised that in a country such as Indonesia, the capacity to understand the role of religion to support their resilience capacity is very much required, and religion based approach is important to give response to disaster impacts. Admittedly, relying on surrendering to God behaviour can indeed give advantage to the government and Lapindo company. In a situation where government did not give a positive contribution that only created uncondusive situation and vulnerabilities to the right and safety of the victims, the God factor became the more effective alternative to improve the resilience of the victims.

“Fatalistic surrender to God has to be seen as more of a strength, not weaknesses. In other words, I would think that surrendering to God has to be managed as the social capital from a religious society, not a social issue that has to be alleviated,” he said.

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