



**Stories from the Grassroots** - The Orion Grassroots Network profiles a new member organization each month. To submit a Story from the Grassroots from your organization, please [contact us](#).



### Green Map System Charting and Promoting Healthier Communities Worldwide

In October 1989, in the Arab Night Market, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, a captive orangutan and I locked eyes. Her long arms stretched outside the confines of a tragically tiny cage, restlessly flipping a stone up and down in her hand. I was transfixed by the sorrow in her face and wordlessly, I tried to communicate my concern. The orangutan's smooth, round stone flew toward me, and as they say, I caught the stone and "turned green."



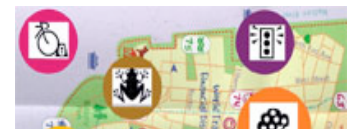
A community garden that appears on a Green Map of Jakarta

At that moment, there was no hint of how this cross-species intervention would help start a movement now impacting the environment in communities around the world. However, I returned home to New York from that life-changing vacation determined to work solely on ecological design projects, veering from the "designosaur" path I had been on. Wanting to make vehicles for social change, I focused on designing products and services that would fulfill needs rather than create wants, waste and extinction. The orangutan's stone had activated me, and I, in turn, sought ways to share this energy with two key groups: urban dwellers (then representing nearly half of humanity) and fellow designers (then an untapped resource for our common future).

During an Earth Summit planning meeting in December 1991, I mused about the thousands of delegates and NGOs coming to the United Nations for several weeks in spring. Would they be able to perceive the signs of progress toward sustainability popping up across the five boroughs - the farmers' markets and green shops, community gardens, clean beaches and greenways, ecology centers, and more?



I decided to make a map of NYC's green spots to provide an enjoyable green tour and a universal resource that can trace and evaluate the progress taking place. By nightfall, it had a name, donated printing, and boom! A





An Indonesian organic market promoted by a Green Map

locally run, globally linked communication movement was underway.

[Green Map System](#) is now rapidly approaching the milestone of 350 Green Maps being created, including 95 in North America. There are countless stories about the ways Green Mapmaking works and the impact it is having on communities of all sizes in 47 countries – I'd

like to share a single example that demonstrates its quality of empowerment and buoys our network's ongoing efforts.

In November 2001, Indonesian urbanist-architect Marco Kusumawijaya visited Green Map's Lower East Side office to share mapping ideas. Just two months after returning to Jakarta, he published the first Indonesian Green Map in the centerfold of *Aikon*, a cultural magazine run by journalists, designers and activists. Showing patterns of progress and challenges, this fresh perspective guided residents and visitors toward engaging in green living, local nature and cultural heritage sites.



Green Map exhibition announcement, Jakarta



A teacher working with her students on a Green Map project in Bandung, Java, Indonesia

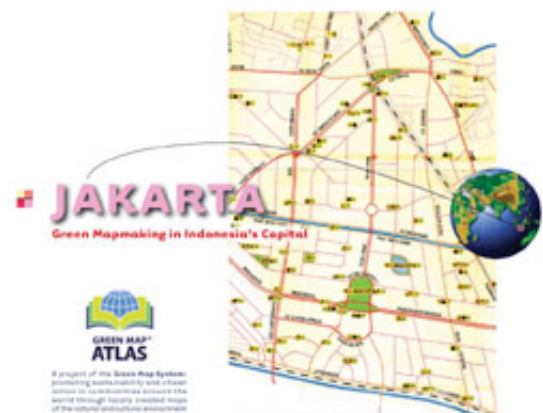
Thanks to Marco's continuing outreach and the *Aikon* network, there are now Green Map projects in eight Indonesian cities that involve and motivate people of all ages. In 2002, a youth team in Yogyakarta published the Green Map that marked the spot where the orangutan slapped sense into my open palm. Marco shared with me the press clippings about their work that credited the orangutan's catalytic gift with Green Map's inception...we had come full circle, and then spiraled onward. Today, Yogyakarta is officially the national secretariat of [Green Map Indonesia](#), and its leaders the youngest in our nascent network of regional hubs.

Indonesia's first dozen published maps are standouts in the global collection of more than 235 locally produced Green Maps. Across the 90% Moslem, yet racially and geographically diverse Indonesian archipelago, new collaborations are forming. Most recently, they

worked together to protect Borobudur, a spectacular 1,200-year-old World Heritage Buddhist monument and its environs from the pressures of development, conflicted resource management and thoughtless tourism. This Borobudur Mandala Green Map provides a marvelous new model for community-based heritage preservation. From my desk, I feel this innovation's reverberations fuel the Green Map "inspiration engine" as I send the news outward to our global network.

Post-tsunami, Marco got involved in the rebuilding effort in the hardest hit area of Banda Aceh, 1,200km from Jakarta. About 60% of the region was flattened by the disaster. Working with the Urban Poor Consortium, Marco and Banda Aceh Green Map coordinator, Sylvia Agustina began holding workshops and designing a "memorial green map" to engage people both in identifying lost sites and to envision the future. With a first view charting 23 villages published on December 26, 2005, this map was used by hundreds of visitors from five tsunami-hit countries who came together for a commemorative conference held in a half-rebuilt village.

Green Maps harness the power of visually expressing peoples' feelings about home (both lost and found) while sharing tools that affirm different experiences and worldviews, leading to dialogue and common awareness about local environments. The stone will continue to be passed to new communities, including those close to one of the few remaining places where orangutans still dwell in the wild.



Jakarta's chapter in 2004's [Green Map Atlas](#)

- Wendy E. Brawer, Green Map founding director,  
with Marco Kusumawijaya and Joshua Rosenthal



Yogyakarta Green Mapmakers meeting, January 2006.  
More images of Green Map System at work  
around the world are at [greenmap.org/album](http://greenmap.org/album).

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