

Facilitator's guide



Drainage Politics: Flood Management in Surabaya, Indonesia

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Summary of the Case

This case can be useful for anyone involved in natural resource management in a sensitive political context.

The case sets out in a city prone to natural disasters, and explores how policy and political commitments can reduce the consequences. After the introduction, readers are invited to reflect on a dilemma of enforcing a mitigation plan that landed public support, but that compromises the political position from which the plan is enforceable. Would they proceed with a democratic reform or secure their position as mayor and accommodate powerful political stakeholders? The case then tells the story how the protagonist leverages public support through a specially developed digital app to enforce a Flooding Task Force with public funds. Compared to the previous regulations where market logic hindered adequate drainage systems, this significantly reduced impact of floods.

Learners are then asked to reflect on the effects of the local political landscape in relation to natural disaster management in a time when climate change magnifies the challenges.

Learning objectives

After the session, participants should understand:

- how the risk of flooding is affected by polity and policies
- that successful flood mitigation depends on the local political ecosystem.
- how digital media can be leveraged to influence political commitment to flood mitigation

Suggested structure of the session

1. Give an intro to the case and the workshop – Emphasize that learning happens in discussions and reflection. Give a background on Indonesia's political landscape (see the text box below). Encourage participants to exit their own context and identify with the scenario and use the protagonist as their starting point.
2. Participants read the first part of the case
3. Small group discussion – reflection questions. Encourage participants to problematize their answers and probe out pros/cons in each other's answers.
4. Participants read the real case ending
5. Small group discussion – reflection questions. Give significant time for this and encourage problematizing and digging deeper. Halfway through, ask participants to apply the questions in their own context.
6. Wrap-up. Ask for reflections from the group and go through the main learning points.

Key lessons

- Flood damages are not merely caused by rain and high water. They are also due to policy and policies. The success or failure of flood protections – reductions in exposure and in vulnerability – depend on the government's firmness in overcoming inequality in drainage system Management and use. The local government must be fully committed to upholding social justice in flood risk-related interventions; they must provide firm support to those implementing these programs at the street-level so that officials and administrators can enforce rules, even against privileged and influential groups in society.
- A healthy local political ecosystem significantly affects successful flood-risk reduction. Public flood-risk reduction is most effective when government leaders have strong political commitment and are under solid public pressure – by being both visible and accountable.
- Digital media can be leveraged to influence city governments to commit seriously to flood-risk reduction.

Background information: Indonesia's democracy

In the 2021 Freedom House index, Indonesia was categorized as partly free. This status has stayed the same since 2013 (freedomhouse.org). The Economist also classified Indonesian democracy as flawed since 2006 (EIU, 2021). It means that Indonesia has had free and fair elections but experienced significant weaknesses in other aspects of democracy, such as in the functioning of governance, underdeveloped political culture, and low levels of political participation (EIU, 2021).

Scholars have recently raised the alarm about Indonesia's democracy, describing this democracy in terms like 'regression' (Power & Warburton, 2020), 'authoritarian innovation' (Mietzner, 2020), and illiberal democracy (Diprose et al., 2019). The rights of citizens are contingent on different levels of personal access and network to the state (Berenschot & van Klinken, 2018). Unprivileged rights holders, such as the urban poor at the river bank, may be targeted by unwarranted evictions without adequate alternative housing (Wilson, 2019). Meanwhile, Indonesia's formal representation system could not represent aspirations from grassroots communities or the lower economic class, as Warburton et al. (2021) indicated that Indonesian politicians are generally more congruent with upper-class voters.

Indonesia has three levels of government. These are central government, provincial government, and district/municipal government. The latter is led by a mayor. In this decentralized system, in place since 1999, the mayor has the authority to produce municipal regulations and formulate the annual budget except for foreign policy, defence and security, court, religion, and monetary/fiscal (Indonesia 2014).

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