

# Testing the Claims of E-government through Engagement

A Case Study from Indonesia



**GLOBAL INTEGRITY**

Data, Learning & Action for Open Governance

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MAKING ALL  
VOICES COUNT

A GRAND CHALLENGE  
FOR DEVELOPMENT

## About Making All Voices Count

Making All Voices Count is a programme working towards a world in which open, effective and participatory governance is the norm and not the exception. It focuses global attention on creative and cutting-edge solutions to transform the relationship between citizens and their governments. The programme is inspired by and supports the goals of the Open Government Partnership.

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# Perkumpulan Prakarsa

Maria Lauranti

## Setting the scene

At the closing ceremony of the 2016 Indonesia National Development Planning event in Jakarta, Sofyan Djalil, the Minister of National Development Planning, stated that e-planning and e-budgeting would be implemented nationwide in 2018. This statement echoed the language of Law No. 25-2009 and was compatible with a commitment in Indonesia's Open Government Partnership (OGP) National Action Plan (2016–2017), which focused on implementing e-government to support business processes in public services. Nevertheless, Djalil's commitment was ambitious, as Indonesia still has various infrastructure, hardware, software and even cultural challenges to make such radical changes.

The Government of Indonesia has proclaimed e-government as a key factor in improving its efficiency and effectiveness. Incorporating technology into public service delivery is expected to promote openness, increase accountability and encourage citizen participation in governance. However, these high hopes contain many assumptions, including that sufficient infrastructure and Internet connectivity exists to support e-government measures across all of Indonesia; that state governments, and society at large, are interested in and able to take advantage of e-government; and that marginalized groups are able and willing to leverage technology to engage with local governments.

Good policy that would reduce the marginalization of Indonesian citizens, and improve the responsiveness and quality of government services must be founded on strong, relevant evidence. Without such evidence, implementation of e-government policy could occur in such a way as to reduce the quality of governance. Therefore, a lack of evidence on the actual use of existing local governments' e-budgeting and e-planning by the intended users may curtail improvements for the system<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Prakarsa developed a theory of change and problem statement at the outset of the project. See [Learning by Doing Made Simple\(r\): A template to guide the design of structured adaptive learning](#) (Making All Voices Count and Global Integrity, 2017).



## Our theory of change

Prakarsa believes that government policy should be based on strong evidence and data. Thus we investigated our assumptions, with a view towards generating evidence-based policy recommendations to the National Secretariat of Open Government Indonesia, in particular the Ministry of National Development, on the most effective means of implementing e-government at subnational levels.

We assumed that, if we were able to involve local governments and leaders in a process of sharing and learning, the central government and other local governments would be more likely to take into account the factors that have supported and hindered the implementation of e-government in various localities that already practice e-government<sup>2</sup>. We strategically selected three localities—Jakarta (a province), Makassar (a city), and Bojonegoro (a regency)—all of which had previously had success in implementing e-government policies. In addition, we targeted key policy-makers at both the national and subnational level to develop appropriate policies for e-government implementation plans, which then could be of optimal use to both the government and society. We intended to use the leadership character of these policy-makers<sup>3</sup> to catalyze change in the state apparatus, including via a research launch involving key figures in the national and subnational governments.

## Practicing adaption in context

### **Inflection points**

At the outset of our project in 2016, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, usually called Ahok, was the governor of DKI Jakarta Province. Ahok is known for being strong and direct—characteristics that have often ruffled feathers—as well as for his commitment to principles of open government. In September 2016, Ahok’s political opponents accused him of blasphemy. The Islamic Defenders Front agitated for his dismissal and pressured those who supported the governor to disavow him. He was eventually formally charged with blasphemy. As his trial progressed, Ahok was campaigning for re-election as governor of Jakarta—an election, which he lost in April 2017, to

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<sup>2</sup> The study was conducted at the sub-national level in DKI Jakarta Province, Makassar City and Bojonegoro Regency. The research locations were changed as per a reflection session conducted by Prakarsa. See “[Learning Journey: Synthesis Brief Reflection](#)” (Making All Voices Count and Prakarsa).

<sup>3</sup> The profile of the provincial governor of DKI Jakarta as a regional leader encouraging the implementation of e-government progressively was an important element in the policy advocacy strategy that Prakarsa was trying to undertake. The profiles of the mayor of Makassar City and the regent of Bojonegoro Regency were similarly important.



Anies Badeswn, who had allied with the IDF and its supporters. Then, in May 2017, Ahok was formally convicted of blasphemy and sentenced to two years in prison.

Ahok's case has several implications. First, it demonstrates that entrenched interests in Indonesia exercise undue influence in opposing reform-minded politicians. Second, the government's response to Ahok's case has been to crack down on the IDF, which has had a chilling effect on civic space in the country, and further limiting space for open government reform. Indeed, this is aptly illustrated the Javanese proverb "because of a speck of indigo, a barrel of milk is lost."

What did this sudden development in Indonesia mean for Prakarsa and our Making All Voices Count (MAVC) project and for the research-based advocacy we had planned? To address this question, Prakarsa conducted a reflection session with all staff involved in the MAVC project. In our reflection, noted our awareness that the strategies we had set up to advance e-government practices through shared learning between leaders and local governments would, because of the Ahok situation, be counterproductive. Describing the success of e-government in DKI Jakarta, Makassar and Bojonegoro as the result of their regional leaders' profiles would potentially lead to various ambiguous political and power interpretations. At the same time, the national and subnational governments might view critical engagement by civil society organizations (CSOs) less favorably.

What is special about this particular project, however, is the flexibility that we had to define and redefine the theory of change. The adaptation approach used in this project required critical thinking and iterative attempts to understand and take into account the political and social dynamics that resulted in Ahok's rapid fall from governor to prisoner. Grappling with these dynamics was essential if we were to achieve our project's desired goals. Forcing the execution of an already designed activity from the start, with the assumption built into a dynamically evolving situation, would have been a waste of resources and nullified the value of our research—an apt demonstration of Einstein's idea that doing the same thing over and over but expecting different results is madness. During the reflection session, we discussed the changes that took place. In our reflection session, we had a group discussion, through which we observed and reflected on the radical changes in our context. We reviewed media coverage to analyze the public perception on Ahok's case<sup>4</sup>. In addition, we triangulated our results by approaching other CSOs to determine whether the Ahok phenomenon has affected their work, and how, and used all of this data to reconsider our engagement strategy.

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<sup>4</sup> Prakarsa conducted reflection session. See "[Prakarsa Documenting Your Adaptive Learning Journey](#)," 14 April 2017.





### **Reflective learning moments**

In relation to our project, the voices of field researchers and local organizations, particularly those that were involved in our research and project conduct in DKI Jakarta, Makassar and Bojonegoro were extremely important. Prakarsa did power and stakeholder mapping with regard to the implementation of open government initiatives in each of our research areas<sup>5</sup>. Our policy dialogue was then designed to accommodate the insights from those exercises, in order to have the most influence on relevant stakeholders. Representatives from central and subnational governments, particularly the district agencies on local development planning, were invited to learn from the research and practices in other areas. Women's groups were also invited in the policy dialogue to express their opinions and share their concerns. The policy dialogue went well and produced key messages for the central government in the preparation of e-government implementation<sup>6</sup>. To ensure that the findings are taken into account in the policy-making processes, we strengthened our relationships with key actors at the national level, namely, the Ministry of National Development Planning, the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of Communications and Informatics, Presidential Executive Office and the National Secretariat of Open Government Indonesia, all of whom we met in bilateral meetings. These officials, in large part because of our efforts and adaptation, are now committed to making sure that the findings of the research are used as evidence in the policy development for e-government implementation.<sup>7</sup>

### **Our thoughts on the adaptive learning approach**

The adaptive learning approach has helped Prakarsa to sharpen our research focus during the preparation and design of the research. We refined our strategy as we tested our assumptions, and developed our plans as we gathered evidence on how we were addressing emerging challenges, and reflected on how we might do better. The adaptive learning approach has also, as outlined above, enabled us to explicitly engage with the political, social and economic factors that direct and indirectly affected the project outputs.

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<sup>5</sup> Prakarsa conducted reflection session. See "[Reflection Session Tools](#)" and "[Documenting Your Adaptive Learning Journey](#)," February 2017.

<sup>6</sup> National media covered the event, putting the key messages of the research findings on the public agenda. See Suryowati, Estu, "[Penerapan E-Government Bojonegoro Dinilai Paling Lengkap](#)," *Kompas*, 30 August 2017; Suryowati, Estu, "[Kota Ini Punya Aplikasi 'Update' Data Kemiskinan melalui Foto](#)," *Kompas*, 30 August 2017; Nur, Mochamad, "[DKI Jakarta Berhasil Terapkan E-Government Lewat Aplikasi Qlue](#)," *JawaPos*, 30 August 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Prakarsa conducted a policy dialogue on 29 August 2017 after the research launch. See "[Minutes - Policy Dialogue](#)" (Prakarsa, 2017).



The participatory nature of the approach, in that it counts all voices, especially with respect to the values and operational factors of the project, has also been useful in helping us challenge our assumptions and make sure that we're making progress towards our goals. We therefore have found the adaptive learning approach to be a good methodology for exploring and adapting our theory of change, and helping us achieve our targets.

However, this approach needs more time in order to be more effective—this means more time for research and implementation, and more time for testing and learning from assumptions. It is also worth noting that different stakeholders may have different capacities to understand and apply the adaptive learning approach.

## The future

We are committed to applying the adaptive learning approach in other researches and projects, particularly those that are being carried out in a dynamic and complex environment. Sustaining this culture is important. To do so, we need to ensure that there is consistent knowledge management that covers the growth and documentation on capacity, skills and products/outputs that have been generated in our application of this approach. In this way, we could introduce the adaptive learning approach to other significant stakeholders, namely (but not limited to) the government, CSOs, educational institutions doing applied research and donor agencies.

Our advocacy work on this project demonstrates the importance of developing and maintaining a learning platform, on which different CSOs can share critical and constructive approaches to effectively engaging with government stakeholders. Finally, the adaptive learning approach should, in the future, contribute to better relations, especially in the context of OGP, and help materialize the values of transparency, accountability and participation. Consequently, our work on this project, and the approach we have applied, will deliver a more feasible, realistic plan and strategy for achieving significant changes in the relations between government and society at large.



## Remaining questions

Prakarsa's research generated evidence-based policy recommendations. In our research report, we highlighted that effective mentoring cannot occur without reflecting on what has been done. Reflecting on and learning about open government practices and the use of e-government is a required component for documenting achievements, identifying inhibiting factors and discovering relevant matters to be adapted during the process of realizing open governance. This can be done by monitoring and evaluating the implementation of open government and the use of e-government, or by conducting research on a regular basis to make improvements and/or changes relevant to the evidence base. Some questions on the implementation of open government moving forward are:

- Can open government and e-government be realized and implemented? If so, what are the enabling factors? How can its quality be improved? If not, what are the hindering factors? How can these be resolved?
- How can stakeholders (i.e., government, the public, the private sector and CSOs) contribute to such efforts?
- What are the tangible benefits open government and e-government for citizens? Are public services improved?





## **Annex 1.**

Supplementary Materials

[Field Harvesting: A Reflection on the Journey of E-Government Implementation in the Sub-National Areas](#) (Prakarsa, August 2017)

[Open Government: Assessment of E-Government Use by Sub-National Governments in Indonesia](#) (Prakarsa, August 2017)