

# Forgetting the Irony of Participation and Empowerment in Participatory Development: How Failed Projects Turn into Exemplary Cases in an Urban Slum District in North Jakarta, Indonesia\*

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**(Abstract)** Local participation and empowerment have become crucial goals in anti-poverty projects, and these values also work as guiding principles in individual projects. In this article, I examine how these ideals and principles operate and perform in various water management programs in a local community of Northern Jakarta. I explore what I call the irony of participation and empowerment, which includes the following two characteristics. First, both concepts of participation and mobilization assume the distinction between those who plan and make designs and those who only have to follow them. Secondly, the target group of empowerment is always delineated and defined as a group of people who lack something important, such as independent agency. In recent decades, community water management projects in Village P in North Jakarta have aimed to connect the poor to the urban water distribution network, but they have invariably failed. The village, however, has become a good example in terms of local participation and empowerment. By analyzing project cases such as the “Waste Bank” and “village guarders,” I highlight the change of meaning of the ideals of resident participation and empowerment. In this process, what I call “a form of future anterior tense” in local discourses conceals that immediate results of the project cannot solve the water problem, especially seasonal floods. On the other hand, the “guarders” in the local community participate in activities designed and

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directed by experts and intellectuals from outside of “the poor” community. In this context, the existence of the “guarders” themselves becomes a token of participatory development and local empowerment, although their positions and roles are still based on the distinction between residents who participate and those who do not.

## 1. Introduction: The Irony of Participation and Empowerment

Today, empowerment is both a goal and a procedural principle that must be adhered to in the anti-poverty projects of South Korean and foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).<sup>1</sup> Civic participation and the empowerment of the poor can be seen as the most important criterion in planning, implementing, and assessing projects aimed at addressing poverty (Bakker, Kooy, Shofiani, and Martijn 2006; Menzies and Setiono 2010; Li 2007). What happens, then, when this goal and principle, on which everyone agrees, is applied in the field? In other words, we may ask how participation and empowerment, as internal or on-the-ground criteria of anti-poverty programs, function: what effects they have, what the signs of participation in policy implementation are, why these constitute a basis for evaluating degree of participation, and how the existence, absence, increase, and decrease of participation are measured.<sup>2</sup>

In this article, starting from the fact that civic participation and empowerment are ironic by nature, I use the example of a slum in North Jakarta to trace how this irony came to be forgotten. I begin by briefly summarizing the two ironies: (1) Participation is regarded as the opposite of mobilization, but while it is not mobilization of one kind, it is mobilization of another; (2) As long as they are targeted by empowerment policies, the poor will always be seen as lacking power. Participation and

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<sup>1</sup> In the history of anti-poverty policy, participation and empowerment have not always been treated as equally important. An analysis of this issue remains to be performed (see Mohan 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Seo Bogyong (2017) examined the possibilities and impossibilities of the normative assertion of empowerment as a project for endowing oppressed minorities with power under the principle of taking it as a starting point rather than a solution. In this article, by contrast, while sharing Seo’s starting point, I intend to focus on the principles of civic participation and empowerment as a “logic of the field” that renders possibilities tangibly visible and impossibilities invisible.

mobilization are difficult to distinguish because both concepts are premised on the separation of those planning action and those implementing it. It cannot be said that somebody who works as a breadwinner is participating in breadwinning in order to stay alive. The very fact that civic participation is set as a goal is premised on the fact that decision makers and actual agents of participation remain separate in policy and project decisions and implementation processes. As long as a person is not making their own decisions about their own actions, and as long as experts are separated from non-experts, participation in policies and projects cannot be completely free of the risk of degenerating into mobilization. The most widely known way of escaping this predicament is distinguishing between top-down and bottom-up. “The influencing of decision-making processes by professional decision makers as a duty or a right... is not participation.... True [participation] is only ‘bottom-up’ action, not ‘top-down’” (Chamyeo Sahoe Yeongso 1997: 17). But the criterion of whether participants at the bottom can intervene in the processes and outcomes of decision-making at the top divides bottom from top too. The distinction between the decision maker making a policy and the objects of those policies remains. Secondly, if the question of whether stakeholders in anti-poverty policies can actually intervene and influence policy decisions and implementation processes is the most important point when it comes to empowerment, then empowerment must be an ironic concept. But programs that aim to empower specific areas or populations are themselves discriminatory in terms of effect. Empowerment programs for the poor are common, but there are no empowerment programs for the rich. Empowerment programs aimed at the poor assume that their objects are incomplete and missing something (see Cruikshank 2014), and that the poor people that they latch onto are passive figures lacking agency. In the same context, announcements that empowerment has been successfully achieved and that, as a result, a poor neighborhood has been sufficiently developed and the program is finished, are extremely rare. As long as the definers of want and impotence and the defined remain the same, empowerment still entails the risk of discrimination, no matter how the criteria distinguishing lack and sufficiency may change.

In this article, I use the example of a poverty relief program implemented in the neighborhood of “P” in North Jakarta—a place that lacks water for domestic use and suffers from flooding every year—to describe the logic by which the two ironies of participation and empowerment become over-

looked on the ground.<sup>3</sup> In section two I summarize arguments that assess projects aimed at solving water problems both as failures and as successes. And in section three, I use the case of a Waste Bank (a project designed to help prevent floods) to illustrate the logic of future anterior promises that interpret failure as success. The case of the Waste Bank, though different in aim and style of implementation from other projects conducted at Village P, illustrates the general principle whereby a project is accepted as a solution despite not immediately solving the targeted problem. Finally, in section four, I demonstrate how resident-activists known as “guarders”<sup>4</sup> offer tangible grounds for labeling Village P a successful example of civic participation and empowerment.

## 2. Continuously Failing Projects, Successful Neighborhood

Village P had a water supply rate of no more than 40 percent after the privatization of Jakarta’s water<sup>5</sup> in 1997 and often suffers from flood damage. The village has seen the launch of several water-related projects (Padawangi and Douglass 2015; Zaenuddin 2013). In the early to mid-2000s, a poverty eradication project impact assessment indicated that no one-off intervention could solve the village’s water problems; since then, several so-called water projects have been in continuous process. But each one—extension of the water supply network, communal water tanks, introduction of low water tariffs for low-income areas, and the operation of water trucks and distribution stations—ended up experiencing unforeseen outcomes and

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<sup>3</sup> Though my analysis differs greatly in terms of premise, object, and method, I have borrowed from Niklas Luhmann (2012, 2014) the idea that a given system always contains ironies, and that actions occurring within the system hide or compensate for these ironies.

<sup>4</sup> “Guarders” is the term used by the international NGO to denote resident-activists. “Future Prospects,” the Indonesian branch of an international NGO that was active in Village P, called resident-activists in the neighborhood “guarders.” The guarders themselves addressed each other using the suffixes *-bu* (ma’am) and *-pak* (sir), using the term “guarder” at neighborhood events or official gatherings such as briefing sessions.

<sup>5</sup> The privatization of Jakarta’s water services has long been a subject of controversy, with civic groups leading an ongoing struggle to have the policy annulled (See Kruha 2013). Ultimately, privatization was terminated by Indonesia’s Supreme Court on October 12, 2017, after the field study conducted for this article had finished. Jakarta’s water services were subsequently re-nationalized.

missing its planned target (Yi Gyeongmuk 2017; Asian Development Bank 2015; Iwan 2008). If these projects were meant to connect the residents of the slum directly to the urban water mains, they ended in failure.

Clean water projects, such as extension of the water supply network, communal water tanks, low water tariffs for low-income areas, and the operation of water trucks, ended up veering off their planned courses. Corrupt water vendors have opened thriving water shops, while residents buy water at 8–10 times the official water rate. Residents' houses are not connected to the water pipe by the main road, and the slum's cheap mains water is sold to the next neighborhood. Benefactors of the communal meter project, which connected 60 poor families to the water mains, share water with their neighbors then buy any extra water that they need. The extension of the mains water supply has left monopolistic water shops, while the communal water tank pilot project failed to spread; and what happens to the cheap water is an open secret among not only residents but local activists and even those in higher-ranking organizations (Yi Gyeongmuk 2017: Chapter 3).

When I asked if the water shops, which had appeared due to the water mains expansion, were in fact “legal,” Agus (alias), a coordinator of Future Prospects (alias), the most active NGO in the neighborhood, and Suwarno (alias), the head of social and cultural affairs at the neighborhood office, answered as follows:

Suwarno: If you want to know how many businesses in our neighborhood are actually legal, they're all illegal except a few big restaurants and convenience stores. The rows of *lima kaki* (mobile stalls selling deep-fried snacks or *bakso*, Indonesian-style fish cakes) and roadside restaurants are all illegal. It would be impossible to clamp down on all of them, but even if you did, they would just get hold of the documents from somewhere or other. In this neighborhood, it's not much use asking if something is legal or not.

Agus: Not all the men that used to be at the water shop are still there now. And water has really got a lot cheaper than before. It's not even half of what it was. You could say we've succeeded, since you can now use water much more cheaply than what you used to pay to the water vendors. And if you want to connect your own pipe to the water mains and you have the money, you can still do it now.

The above arguments were repeated when I asked about the communal meter project or the water trucks that took and sold the water elsewhere.

Examples of answers included that the communal meter project was desirable and successful, and that the sharing of water thus obtained by citizens with their neighbors was their own decision; that the siphoning off of water by trucks, though it wasn't great behavior, wasn't such a big problem compared to the old water mafias, which had drilled holes in the pipe and siphoned it off without paying anything. To activists and citizens, the unexpected outcomes of water supply projects were not seen as serious failures. Moreover, evaluations and audits of the projects went no further than confirming the results anticipated in the project plans; "unforeseen variables" not established at the beginning of the projects had no bearing on their evaluation (see Power 1999). The repeated occurrence, reporting, and discussion of unforeseen outcomes could clearly become problematic. On the other hand, local activists knew about these but did not actively state their opinions at the project evaluation phase. This is because, to NGO activists, the continuation of development projects in the area of Village P unquestionably counted above all else. Karim, a strong critic of the effect of micro finance in Bangladesh, described the formula by which the NGO discourse between policymakers and activists functions as follows: "The discourses function as discourses of exclusion. Within the NGO discourse, alternative or oppositional voices are largely neutralized; when they are included, these critiques have no practical effects. Questions of economic survival inhibit actors deeply entwined in NGOs from speaking out" (Karim 2015: 275–276).

The more professional NGO activists are present in the field of development, the more persuasive becomes Karim's analysis of why the failures or unexpected outcomes of programs are covered up rather than reported. But Karim's explanation is not enough when it comes to elucidating why failures become successes in Village P. Firstly, P has guarders, citizen-activists attached to Future Prospects. Though some guarders may be quasi-activists who have participated continuously in the local work of various NGOs since 2008, such guarders constitute a minority. Secondly, the explanation that failures are covered up in the interest of those working in the NGO industry is only complete when accompanied by an explanation of why citizens, the objects of the policy in question, participate in the policy themselves. Thirdly, in a situation where those who made a policy are conducting continuous project evaluations, claims that failure goes unreported due to collusion among stakeholders are unconvincing. The pivotal question here is that of which failures and problems can be

tolerated, and for which ones accountability must be sought. Local civil servant Suwarno, who was not directly involved in the projects, gave the following ambiguous answer: “Yes. Strictly speaking, those projects are failures. But the fact that projects are still being carried out in this area is a success. So, they are successes.”

When I pressed him further, mentioning the outcomes of failed policy experiments and asking if he thought projects conducted in the village had succeeded or failed, he answered that although each project had failed, “ongoing failure in the village [was] a success.” This answer appears to perfectly sum up the various answers I received from guarders, Future Prospects’ resident-activists in Village P, and from regular village residents: “It’s not good, but what can you do?” “We can’t drink well water anymore, so it’s lucky we have water shops,” “Even if you do get connected to the pipe, the water doesn’t run properly, so it’s better just to use a water shop,” and “I don’t expect anything special from the program, but I hope it continues.”

There are two levels to the idea that failure is success. The statement “strictly speaking, all those projects are failures” is an argument made from the perspective of planning, implementing, and evaluating projects. And the statement “having projects constantly in progress in this area is a success” comes from the standpoint of those living in the village where the projects are taking place. From their perspective, the projects are a success because some people in the village benefit from them. Why, then, do not only villagers but also outside experts brand Village P a successful model case? Why is Village P held up and recognized as a case of successful water projects, despite the fact that its water supply projects did not succeed? The fact that the projects brought benefits to some people in the village cannot be enough to explain their transformation from failures to successes (see Mohan 2011). The explanation that some people depended on the projects and others benefited from them may explain why the projects’ failure to achieve their outcomes was not actively conveyed to their planners, but it cannot explain what enables the irrational but positive evaluation that “the continuation of failure is a success.”

The decisive turning point where failure transforms into success is the goal and principle of civic participation and empowerment. This mantra, repeated in the same form everywhere, from Future Prospects’ central office to the activists working at Village P’s communal rest area, was the ultimate goal of action. In the village, where policies for the poor were constantly in progress, achieving civic participation and empowerment is a more

important goal for a single project than achieving its original goals and effects.

The following is a conversation that I had with Yusef (alias), head of water projects at Future Prospects' central office:

Author: "What are the most important water projects that you have in progress at the moment?" (As director of projects in slums across Jakarta, he did not know much about the projects underway in Village P, but he gave the following answer:)

Yusef: "The biggest problem in Jakarta right now is sewage. The sewers in slums are full of waste. And children play in the dirty water. The same goes for Village P."

Author: "Sewer works are a big job that the city government should take care of. What can NGOs do?"

Yusef: "Providing the infrastructure is important. But, as you probably know, the spontaneous participation of citizens is the most important thing in community development these days. The government has to play a role in solving sewer infrastructure problems, but in the long term, providing the foundations for citizens to build sustainable communities is much more important."

The water projects in Village P were woefully inadequate when it came to solving the slum's water problems. P was chosen from among Jakarta's oldest and most densely populated illegal settlements as the target of policies to solve water problems in order to silence critics who claimed that poor people would be hit hard by price increases expected after privatization of water services. But with many locals lacking official Jakarta certificates of residence, the strong residual influence of water vendors that had built up over the previous decades, and with homes arranged along a labyrinthine network of alleyways, a ground-breaking increase in water supply was extremely hard to achieve. Resolving the problems of inadequate water supply and flood damage, both key factors in sustaining the vicious cycle of poverty, was a difficult task from the start. The water-related projects implemented in Village P, beginning in 2000, thus asserted ultimate goals of civic participation and empowerment while working on the principle of selecting communities deemed capable of fulfilling these ideals (Iwan 2008).



### 3. The Failure > Success Conversion Rule: The Case of the Waste Bank

Village P water supply projects, implemented as a pro-poor policy,<sup>6</sup> can hardly be described as successful in the actual sense of the word because they did not result in more poor people being directly connected to urban water services. In spite of this, Village P became a successful case because achieving civic participation and empowerment is regarded as more important than meeting a project's original goals and desired effects.

#### *1) How to link flooding and waste: Clean up Jakarta and the Waste Bank*

Before the 2013 monsoon season, placards reading “Clean Up Jakarta” went up across the city, and a public TV advertisement campaign showed celebrities clearing waste from streets, rivers, and canals. Then-Jakarta governor and now-president Joko Widodo<sup>7</sup> designated November 10 a citywide clean-up day, and many people took part. The campaign was based on a formula for defining and resolving the issue of flooding, which had come to the fore following serious floods in January of that year. The



Figure 1. The 2013 “Clean Up Jakarta” campaign

<sup>6</sup> The term “pro-poor” is problematic, in that it does not clearly reveal the intention to entrench the position of the state (or its institutions). This relates intimately to the fact that the goals of civic participation and empowerment are themselves premised on a separation between planners and protagonists, which I describe in this article as an irony. For further discussion on the status of slums in Jakarta, see Abeyasekere (1987); regarding recent changes in the focus of policy toward Jakarta slums, see Kusno (2015).

<sup>7</sup> In Indonesia, Joko Widodo is known by the nickname Jokowi.

**Table 1.** Jokowi's Clean Up Jakarta

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|---|
| (1) frequent flooding + (2) waste impeding water flow and causing floods  |
| Solution:   |
| (a) large-scale clean-up project led by the city government → (b) prevention of flooding by reducing waste in rivers and canals |

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slogan “Clean Up Jakarta” was aimed not only at beautifying the city and improving hygiene but was also promoted as a project to solve the flooding problem. Clean Up Jakarta was based on the premise that floods could be prevented by clearing waste that was blocking the flow of water in various canals and rivers.

The link between waste, impeded water flow, and flooding does not provide a complete diagnosis of or solution for Jakarta's ongoing flooding problems. With its incomplete urban infrastructure, the city effectively has no sewer system, while the width and depth of the rivers that flow through it are constantly decreasing. Several experts have pointed out that Jakarta's flooding problem cannot be solved without building a sewer system. Despite this, the Clean Up Jakarta campaign shifted the blame onto those who threw waste into rivers, particularly poor urban residents who lived in high concentrations along riverbanks, making them out to be the key cause of what was, in fact, failed urban policy. The assumption that Jakarta's citizens (particularly poor people living on riverbanks) were potential litter-discarding criminals was even more clearly manifested in projects conducted by Basuki Tjahaja Purnama—nicknamed Ahok—Jokowi's successor as governor of Jakarta.<sup>8</sup> Ahok created and managed “Orange Troops,” teams entrusted with cleaning urban rivers in order to prevent a recurrence of flooding. As part of his river clean-up campaign, he also collected written pledges from residents living by waterways—pledges that they would not litter (*Asia Sentinel* 2015, *Jakarta Post* 2013).

The link between waste blocking water flow, residents littering, and flood damage was a strong one, and it was introduced in Village P, too, as part of a flood-prevention project. Notable here is the fact that waste clearing for the sake of flood prevention transformed into a “Waste Bank” (Bank Sampah bersama), in the form of a civic self-support program. The

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<sup>8</sup> Ahok's policy of demolishing the slums along city waterways and forcibly relocating residents also emerged as an issue (see *Jakarta Post* 2015).

**Table 2.** Ahok's river-cleaning teams and written pledges

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| (1) frequent flooding + (2) waste impeding water flow and causing floods   |
| Solution:  |
| (a) ban on discarding waste in rivers and canals → (b) prevent flooding by reducing amount of waste in rivers and canals |

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**Table 3.** Identifying water problems in the Waste Bank project

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|--|
| (1) frequent flooding + (2) waste impeding water flow and causing floods   |
| Solution:  |
| (a) reduce waste in the neighborhood by having residents process it themselves, profiting in the process → (b) prevent flooding in Jakarta through spread of Waste Banks |

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Waste Bank project combined two simultaneous objectives: preventing flooding and creating a clean environment by clearing the waste that filled sewers and riverbanks; and providing extra income for citizens who reprocessed and sold recyclables, such as plastic items and glass they collected. It was called the Waste Bank because all participants opened an account into which they received a monetary deposit each time they collected and brought back recyclable items. Future Prospects provided the hardware for processing recyclables at the Waste Bank. The initial plan, when the bank was launched, was to train village residents as full-time workers in account management and recyclable processing for 6 months, until they were used to the work, then to leave residents to run and manage the bank themselves.

The Clean Up Jakarta campaign and the coupling of water (floods) and waste in the Waste Bank project were the same in that, in both cases, the flaw remained: flood prevention through waste reduction was just a stop-gap policy. But the two schemes differed greatly in terms of logic and scale. It can be assumed that projects I and II would be more effective than III as flood-prevention policies because they encompassed the whole of Jakarta. The Waste Bank was implemented on a neighborhood level, giving it a smaller anticipated effect. Projects II and III, by contrast, show a clear difference when it comes to coupling waste in rivers and canals to residents. In II, citizens are “waste discarders,” while in III, they are “waste clearers.” If the policies in I were transplanted unaltered to the laboratory neighborhood, the difference in scale would drastically reduce their anticipated effect. On the other hand, the vision of II could not be brought “into” the



Figure 2. Waste Bank launch ceremony at Village P

neighborhood because it posits citizens as objects of potential punishment and is incompatible with the virtues of civic participation and empowerment. When one considers that Jakarta's poor live in high concentrations near rivers and canals, this effectively means that they are the citizens targeted for regulation by laws banning littering. As long as it points to poor people as potential criminals and announces powerful sanctions in response, Ahok's Orange Troop project remains outside poor neighborhoods despite being a policy implemented in them.

## 2) *Future perfect promises*

The launch ceremony for the Waste Bank, which took place in spring 2014, was a large-scale event for which Future Prospects project managers, coordinators, and resident guarders were all mobilized. A vacant lot often used for neighborhood events was filled with portable chairs, and some 200 citizens, community leaders, and high-ranking guests from NGOs attended. Resident guarders, contrary to their normal practice, made great efforts to put on makeup and formal clothes. They set up seats, checked to ensure the children's groups performing at the event had arrived, and looked after the participants from their own neighborhood divisions. The MC at the launch ceremony was the female guarder deemed to be the best speaker. The speech given at the ceremony by the head of the neighborhood, while asserting flood prevention to be the purpose of the bank, offered a good illustration of the logic that whether the project achieved its aim or not would have no bearing on judgment of its success or failure—

the logic, in other words, of “ongoing failure in the name of success.”

We have various things in our neighborhood. We have a museum that is a tourist spot visited by many foreigners, and we have an old fish market. We have people who have come from all over Indonesia to Jakarta. We have old things and new things. We don't have only good things, but we don't have only bad things either. Waste and floods are among the bad things in our neighborhood. Waste flows here on the water, and floods come every year. But collecting and recycling waste helps everyone's life. When we clear the waste, the floods will ease. If the Waste Bank succeeds in our neighborhood, it will be continued in other neighborhoods, and then waste will disappear all around Jakarta, and so will floods. I pray for the success of the Waste Bank.

In the speech above, the residents of Village P are mentioned not as litterers but as people converting bad things to good. As a result of their actions, waste will disappear and Jakarta's floods will be prevented. The neighborhood head's promise that the effect of the Waste Bank, which converts waste to money, will spread to other places, and, as a result, waste will disappear across Jakarta, thereby ending flooding, is a huge exaggeration. And none of the residents believed it. When I asked participants at the event, “Don't you think the floods will ease off if the Waste Bank works well?” they teased me, saying, “You really think that could happen?” The important thing was that even if it did not appear as if the promise would be kept, its veracity could not immediately be judged. Because the vision in the neighborhood head's speech took the form of the future anterior tense, nobody could condemn it as a lie or demand accountability if it did not unfold in accordance with its blueprints.<sup>9</sup> No one really believed it, but no one could refute it, and because it was integrated with a higher goal that nobody wanted to refute, the Waste Bank for flood prevention could remain a successful water project solely for operating as a workfare program, increasing residents' income. Future perfect logic

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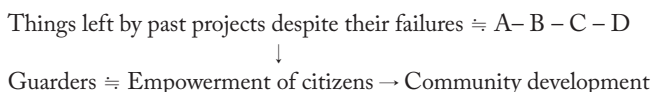
<sup>9</sup> In the third chapter of *Biocapital*, within his analysis of drug development industries in the biotechnology sector, Sunder Rajan offers an interesting analysis of “future-oriented statements.” He defines the speeches and visions of entrepreneurs promoting the need for non-existent new drugs (while attempting to attract investment) as a future-oriented discourse, emphasizing that the advantage of future-oriented visions is that they need not be true, and entrepreneurs are not bound by a duty to realize all the plans that they themselves put forward. “While [a promise about the future] does not guarantee the realization of the vision in the future, it is a necessary condition for such a realization” (2012: 188). (See Sunder Rajan 2012: 166–208).

illustrates the basic framework by which projects are labeled successful even if they can only be judged as failures in terms of their actual effects. This logic begins and ends with civic participation and empowerment. At the starting point, this logic means preference for projects that run on the participation (/mobilization) of poor people, rather than treating them as unilateral objects for correction, so that projects such as Clean Up Jakarta, Ahok's river-cleaning teams and pledges, and other Waste Bank projects are made possible. At its end point, this logic means that projects claiming that the Waste Bank will bring an end to floods will continue into the future.

#### 4. Guardians $\doteq$ Empowerment of Residents

Anti-poverty projects in Village P did not bring about a ground-breaking increase in water supply, nor did they allow citizens to buy water at official tariffs. The projects also failed to eliminate local flooding. However, there is an indisputable basis for citing the neighborhood as a successful case of civic participation and empowerment: the guardians, resident-activists who can prepare and conduct various events. Guardians are resident members and activists in the neighborhood branch of Future Prospects, the Indonesian branch of an international NGO. Guardians were praised at every event by attendees from the NGO's central office and activists from other areas as model examples of local action by Future Prospects. Those praising them cited the passion and ability of Aldi (alias) and Agus (alias), coordinators of guardian activity and communal development in Village P. Guardians are "desirable" citizens of Village P, which has undergone several anti-poverty projects.

The guardian organization is important in two respects. Its activities make policies and events possible and are something that can only be obtained through such policies and events. Their activity will increase the (autonomous) ability to participate—a truly important quality lacked by poor people. This logic can be expressed through the diagram below:



A, B, C, and D above represent the anticipated and unexpected results of projects. These results include failure. The reason projects are not linked to their results by an equals sign in the equation is that they did not produce their originally assumed results. In the same way, guarders and empowerment of citizens cannot be linked by an equals sign. The approximately equals sign ( $\approx$ ) indicates that the left and right sides of the equation are provisionally judged to be equal. But can the existence of an organization preparing and running neighborhood events be said to fulfill the aims of civic participation and empowerment in the neighborhood? Why, and under what conditions, are the guarders an index of civic participation and empowerment?

### 1) *The status of coordinators*

Their simultaneous inclusion in two organizations—the neighborhood and the NGO—gives guarders, as resident-activists, dual status. As resident members of Future Prospects, they are the outcome and measure of exemplary NGO activity; at the same time, they indicate how civic participation and empowerment in Village P have reached a higher level than in other neighborhoods. Guarders are seen as vectors or promoters enabling the attainment of the ultimate aim of a political experiment—the development of the neighborhood community—that cannot yet be called a complete success. Why, then, do their two statuses, as NGO members and as slum residents, not clash? The reason lies in the composition of their organization and the way they act.

Two guarders worked as community development coordinators under the officer (*direktur*) of the local office in Village P, known as the “shelter.” Other employees helped with general administrative work. In addition to the *direktur* and the coordinators, three or four project managers (PMs) running key projects in the neighborhood made frequent visits to the office, but they did not work there constantly, and the coordinators and other guarders did not refer to them as “neighborhood people.” PMs came to the office temporarily and for very short periods of time in order to prepare events or projects, and they hardly had any close ties with locals from the neighborhood. Regional Director Gilum (alias), a woman in her 50s, was the PM in charge of the NGO’s activities, in the sense that she took part in meetings and events at the NGO’s central office and received work reports from coordinators and PMs; she was also a coordinator, in the

sense that she always took part in neighborhood events and made an effort to maintain close relationships with resident guarders. In comparison to coordinators Aldi and Agus, however, she did not know the neighborhood that well.

Coordinators Aldi and Agus emphasized several times that they were not PMs. PMs were activists who explained and conveyed the significance of projects planned by Future Prospects' central office—such as the Waste Bank, waste separation, waterway clearing, and a children's mobile library—and took care of the associated administrative processes; coordinators chose people to manage and conduct these projects within the village, working with them to prepare and implement each project.

Most of Future Prospects' events were conducted in conjunction with other NGOs. NGO activists generally led events held for local women and children. During event preparations, coordinators linked the neighborhood to outside NGO activists and linked guarders and PMs for ongoing activities, such as the Waste Bank. Coordinators also linked neighborhood residents to the upper echelons of Future Prospects and to civil servants in the neighborhood office and the district office. They raised issues and fought in the residents' corner, based on residents' circumstances and local situations, but they also had a role as leaders, managing and directing the guarders that implemented each project. Coordinators' leverage came from their knowledge of local residents, their ability to mobilize guarders, and the fact that they were not directly controlled by the central office. During my study, coordinators were involved in activities such as preparing and conducting the Waste Bank event, managing workfare recycling projects, overseeing sewer maintenance and public toilet expansion projects, holding competitions for children, and promoting public healthcare for women and HIV prevention education. They were also active in delivering aid during floods and in local community education programs.

As salaried members of an organization, coordinators were sometimes sent to other neighborhoods, where they performed the same work as PMs. Village P's coordinators became PMs in other neighborhoods. By contrast, PMs who described themselves as having no neighborhood of their own were PMs in all neighborhoods. Aldi and Agus also worked as PMs at nearby Village A, on projects including a flood response training program at the local elementary school, a small business start-up training program at the neighborhood office, and a workfare program—making and selling cushions from discarded plastic—for “women who couldn't yet be



called guarders but had the potential to become them.” I asked Aldi when women who had potential to become guarders would, in fact, become guarders, and he explained that it would happen when an office opened in Village A and coordinators started working there. Aldi grumbled that working in Village A, where he didn’t know anybody, was harder than working in Village P, saying that when he arrived in Village P four years ago for a flood damage relief project, he had been in the same boat as the PMs visiting the neighborhood now.

Explanations of the roles of guarders, coordinators, and PMs in the Future Prospects organization and of the conditions in which one became a coordinator or a guarder confirm two things. Firstly, guarders and coordinators are defined by the boundary between the neighborhood and the outside (interior and exterior). Secondly, roles in NGO community development work can be arranged in a continuum running from the neighborhood to the outside. If guarders are seen as “loose” members of the NGO and as residents of the neighborhood, coordinators are at once loosely attached to the neighborhood by way of guarders and tied, less tightly, to the outside by way of PMs and NGO activists. In other words, if the neighborhood is placed on the left and the NGO central office and administrative organization, outside the village, on the right, we can arrange the equation as follows: neighborhood residents  $\approx$  guarders  $\approx$  coordinators  $\approx$  outside PMs/NGO activists during events  $\approx$  central office, administrative organization. This shows that each role, though not the same as the two on either side of it, has areas of overlap. To explain the approximate equals signs to the left and right of “coordinator”: a coordinator without guarders is like a PM or an outside activist visiting for an event and will, therefore, find it hard to work in the neighborhood, while a coordinator without PMs or outside activists will not have any events or projects to prepare for with guarders. From the guarder side, a coordinator is both a representative and a bridge linking to the NGO central office and to outside activists; from the coordinator side, a guarder is both a bridge providing a link to the neighborhood and a representative of neighborhood residents. When the focus is shifted to PMs and outside NGO activists, PMs can meet and influence guarders and neighborhood residents via coordinators; the latter constitutes a doorway to the locals. As long as there are coordinators, PMs have no compelling need to meet guarders or local residents directly. Guarders and coordinators sit on the boundary separating the neighborhood from the outside. Coordinators come from outside the neighborhood but work as if

representing it from the inside, facing outward. Guardians are neighborhood residents but participate in the projects and events of NGOs coming from outside.

2) *Two roles intertwined: coordinators and guardians*

The most important link in the administrative organization chain—neighborhood residents  $\rightleftharpoons$  guardians  $\rightleftharpoons$  coordinators  $\rightleftharpoons$  outside PMs/NGO activists during events  $\rightleftharpoons$  central office—is that of guardians  $\rightleftharpoons$  coordinators. Guardians were not only central figures in implementing anti-poverty projects but also the reason that multiple projects converged in Village P. The reason no Waste Bank was established in adjacent neighborhoods with even worse flooding problems than those of Village P was that the former had no related experience. They had not held events or briefing sessions, nor had they filled out documents for resident-led projects; they also lacked understanding of other citizens. The selection of Village P accords with the lesson left by evaluations of previous projects: without civic empowerment confirmed through previous projects, top-down, pork-barrel projects like those from 30 years ago were bound to be repeated. The values of civic participation and empowerment divided citizens capable of running projects from those who had no experience or education. The guardians of Village P had experience and a track record of participation in anti-poverty projects, and they themselves were capable of conducting work previously done by outside activists (or intellectuals). In this sense, they met the requirements for empowerment and participation. The ultimate goal of coordinators is enabling guardians to plan and hold neighborhood events without PMs or event experts. But the paperwork and funding applications for autonomous activities by citizens were completed by coordinators. On the other hand, coordinators were only able to conduct their various activities in Village P thanks to the presence of 20–30 guardians—though their number, on paper, was at least three times that.

Sandra, in her late 30s, had no official job title but effectively served as an unofficial representative for Future Prospects' guardians. She was one of the busiest women in Village P. Sandra was the core of the guardian organization, responsible for tasks including attending and running regular gatherings, estimating the needed supplies, and allocating roles to guardians at each neighborhood event. She also conducted introductory presentations for guardian activities in the auditorium at the neighborhood office and

demonstrated recreation dances during events. Sandra was very proud of the fact that she worked as a guarder. "I'm now able to run projects, even without Aldi," she said in a personal interview. Previously, she had received help from coordinators, but recently she had, on her own, successfully applied for funding for a neighborhood cleaning program for residents in North Jakarta.<sup>10</sup>

Some resident guarders took part in events in other areas of Jakarta and Java and on other Indonesian islands. Since Village P was known as a highly successful example of a community development project, its guarders had chances to travel and give presentations about their model case as residents. Coordinators accompanied guarders, the representatives of the citizens, throughout their travels. Some of the guarders had Powerpoint files that they used; examples of presentation topics included the Waste Bank and communal water tank management, the mobile library project (a converted motorbike that carried around a collection of several dozen children's books for lending), and the small business start-up training project for young neighborhood residents.

Guarders and coordinators worked together on projects under way in and outside the neighborhood. The majority of guarders were women. When projects were conducted within the neighborhood, they were under the absolute control and influence of male coordinators. On the other hand, guarders represented the neighborhood when dealing with the outside (the state and superior NGOs) and the inside (regular residents). At events outside the village, and when guarder residents met regular residents, coordinators saw their role as one of helping the guarders, like shadows. While their roles intertwined, the connection between guarders and coordinators differed according to whom they were dealing with; it was when dealing with higher-ranking NGO officials that their union became stronger.

When Aldi returned to his native Papua in May 2014, the whole guarder organization held a large gathering where people both praised his hard work and expressed concerns about their activities following his departure.

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<sup>10</sup> As Sandra commented, if guarder residents start applying for funding and implementing projects without the help of coordinators, this means either that coordinators were no longer needed or that guarder residents had become coordinators. If some guarders became coordinators or coordinators themselves were no longer needed, it can be predicted that, in view of the structure of this argument (standards of civic participation and empowerment) this would be the ultimate exemplary case.

At this farewell event, Aldi spoke at length, sharing his feelings, telling the story of his arrival in the neighborhood, and giving advice about future activity after he was gone. He remembered how, as a Catholic<sup>11</sup> and an outsider from Papua, his arrival alone in the neighborhood had led to big arguments with some women. Selma, a particularly active guarder, called Aldi “scarier than my husband and more trustworthy,” a comment with which all female guarders agreed and laughed at. In his speech, which went on for almost an hour, his words of advice to guarders made a particular impression. Mentioning the several times he had opposed Gilum, the Future Prospects director who had arrived in the neighborhood later than he, and Future Prospects’ central office, he advised the guarders to clash with those in higher positions and to state their positions with confidence. Most clashes between NGO offices and guarders involved budget issues (for most events, guarders wanted to attract more participants, or put more food in the lunchboxes distributed to attendees, or spend more money on gifts for them; the NGO personnel—not coordinators—managed the budget and tried to limit the amount spent). Aldi, who was leaving Future Prospects, kept emphasizing that guarders, when positioned between NGO bureaucracies and citizens, must speak out boldly on behalf of the latter.

Divisions emerging within the population of Village P are evidenced by a number of indicators: the relationship between guarders and local, long-term NGO activists; the fact that resident guarders are active as model citizens, spreading word of their exemplary case outside the village; and the fact that, in these processes, relationships of educator and educated, carer and cared-for appear among resident guarders and regular residents. Guarders are no longer regular slum residents. Guarder leader Sandra was powerfully frank in asserting her difference from other people living in the P area (she herself used the term “area” rather than “neighborhood”).

Sandra: “Outsiders think the people living in the P area are all the same. But we [resident guarders], unlike others in this area, travel to various places, give presentations, and receive education. We probably experience and learn more than normal people in Jakarta.”

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<sup>11</sup> Aldi often mentioned that he was an outsider, from Papua, and a Catholic. In general, international NGO Future Prospects was run separately from neighborhood Muslim organizations, and the “Papuan Catholic” label, a kind of external credential, was deployed when emphasizing freedom from corruption problems in official neighborhood organizations.

Guarders occupy a hybrid position. They are poor, but not in an impotent or passive sense. Within empowerment programs for poor people, they are regarded as already-empowered residents. Guarders are becoming more like coordinators. The reason Village P is cited as a model example of civic participation is that it has transformed the line of division between outside intellectuals (eliciting participation/mobilization) and citizens (as objects mobilized/compelled to participate) into a line separating regular citizens from citizens who actively participate in projects. In the initial stages, it was experts/outside decision makers who assumed the role of emphasizing the need for and value of civic participation and empowerment, in a slum with no previous experience of development projects. But as long as outside experts teach and lead local citizens, it is hard to evaluate a project as having met the goals of civic participation and empowerment. While community development coordinators were a transitional bridge for attaining the goal of civic participation, an organization of resident guarders (actively participating workers) later formed in the village, and their roles merged with the work of community coordinators. The center of gravity in the ambiguous roles, mixing inside and outside, that formed during this process shifted from community coordinators to guarders. At events outside the neighborhood, guarders rather than coordinators were the keynote speakers, even though their command of language and presentation skills may have been somewhat lacking. The fact that guarders now held the positions formerly occupied by outside experts was a powerful and positive factor in making Village P a model case.

## 5. Conclusion

Many studies of anti-poverty projects reach the “reasonable” conclusion that the project in question failed to elicit “sufficient” civic participation or empower poor people themselves. This article began by examining the fact that civic participation and empowerment in anti-poverty programs targeting slums are both goals to be aimed for and principles that must be adhered to in the implementation process. When civic participation and empowerment have already arrived in the field, what new arguments and stories begin? Questions then introduced to investigate the on-the-ground logic comprised two layers.

In the third section, The Failure > Success Conversion Rule, I compared

three projects that shared the logical framework that recurring floods in megacity Jakarta were caused by waste blocking waterways, and floods could be prevented by removing the waste: the Clean Up Jakarta project, the campaign to ban and receive written pledges about littering, and the Waste Bank in Village P. The waste-waterway-flood connection and the goal of flood prevention needed transforming in order to conduct a neighborhood-level project. This was achieved by labelling low-income residents not as individuals to be mobilized in large-scale clean-up campaigns, nor as illegal litterers, but as people clearing waste (and making extra income as a result), while ultimately preventing recurring floods. Although residents and the coordinators working in the neighborhood were perfectly aware that the Waste Bank project could not immediately—and perhaps not ever—bring an end to the floods, the Waste Bank was accepted as a model flood-prevention policy. It would not stop Jakarta's floods, but the fact that an ongoing project was underway in the neighborhood was a sign that the paramount ideals of civic participation and empowerment were being realized. Ultimately, ending floods in Jakarta and in Village P was set as a goal to be achieved in the future.

In the fourth section, *Guarders = Empowerment of Residents*, I showed how the existence of guarders, resident-activists, is clear evidence that the goals and principles of civic participation and empowerment have been achieved in Village P. Guarders are not just significant as agents capable of preparing events and implementing projects in the neighborhood; if they are regarded only as such, it is impossible to tell whether they are spontaneous participants or mobilized objects. Looking deeper into the projects underway in the neighborhood, I was able to formulate the following continuous spectrum: neighborhood residents = guarders = coordinators = outside PMs/NGO activists during events = central office, administrative organizations. The expert side of the equation comprised coordinators = outside PMs/NGO activists during events = central office, administrative organization; while the slum residents' side comprised neighborhood residents = guarders = coordinators. These two segments met at the link between guarders and coordinators. Coordinators and guarders overlapped ambiguously in terms of status and activity. Ultimately, training resident guarders who required no help from coordinators was posited as "something not immediately achievable," and activity by resident guarders without the need for coordinators was already "partially" happening. Resident guarders had taken on some of the roles previously played

by outside experts, and the distinction between outside experts and poor people had been subsumed and obscured within the ambiguous coordinators = guarders relationship. The existence of guarders caused the inevitably vague boundary between civic participation and mobilization to be forgotten.

But the case of the Waste Bank and the existence of guarders fails to eliminate the irony inherent in civic participation and empowerment posited at the beginning of the article; all it can do is shift the position of the irony. The Waste Bank was able to keep going because it was more a project to increase residents' income than purely one to prevent flooding. Most residents of Village P remain objects of mobilization, while resident guarders are frequently unable to influence policy decision processes and implement the project plans given to them. The case of Village P is one in which civic participation and empowerment have become, at once, goals for which anti-poverty projects must aim and principles for implementing and evaluating the same projects. In becoming self-fulfilling criteria, civic participation and empowerment have filled the space between immediate measures and anticipated ultimate effects, obscuring both the fact that there is a gap between short-term outcomes and anticipated effects of the project and the fact that distinctions between participation and mobilization, and inside and outside, remain. The reason Village P can be recognized as an exemplary case—not only by the citizens who make direct profit through the projects implemented but by those who plan, implement, and evaluate anti-poverty projects—is that the irony inherent in the two virtues of goal and implementation principle has been “plausibly” forgotten. As long as the differences between state/upper echelons of NGOs, NGO activists working in the neighborhood (coordinators), resident guarders and regular residents remain low in profile, and the legitimacy of representation and re-enactment are maintained and not seriously threatened, Village P will remain a model case of civic autonomy and empowerment.

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