

Personal Stories of Change

Bambang Purwanto: A perspective from national government

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Bambang Purwanto is a member of the Indonesian Government Ministry of Public Works, Board for the Support and Development of Water Supply. Bambang joined the Department in 1979 at central level as the Head of Monitoring and Evaluation of Water Enterprise Performance following an earlier career in Bogor City Water. He was involved in the Indonesia Water Dialogues from its early stages and met with Penny Urquhart during her interviews for the Scoping Study in 2004 and attended the first meetings of what would become the Indonesia Working Group.

The background to Bambang's involvement in the Dialogue was overshadowed by general government frustration at the climate around private sector participation in water provision. During the 1990s, many private water companies had tried to enter the Indonesia water sector, but in fifteen years, only twenty contracts were signed. Indonesian Law delegates responsibility for water supply to local government, so central ministries hold little power other than acting as advisers to a sprawling number of provinces (33) and districts (454). Hence Bambang joined the Indonesia Water Dialogues with a "curiosity" about "what kind of animal this 'water dialogue' was". Soon realising that those present all shared the same overarching interest – "how to serve the people with good quality, acceptable quantity, and reliable, consistent services" – Bambang felt that it was OK to join a community that was forming under the banner of The Water Dialogues.

Bambang expresses surprise that, for the first time, he was able to "sit together" with NGOs around a table and understand their perspectives and concerns. This was something "unexpected," and seemingly impossible previously. Bambang also stresses the importance of The Water Dialogues for being able to communicate to its audience the latest policy and strategies of the Government, i.e. the dialogue provided a conduit for discussing these developments. The openness of those involved in The Water Dialogues is something that Bambang feels helped to pass various pieces of legislation on water supply: "When we had legislation introduced they [members of the Dialogues] have been able to influence the content and the ability of the government to pass these legislations."

Aside from the impact on the wider policy environment, Bambang points out the crucial role that The Water Dialogues has played in allowing him to engage with colleagues in other countries working on similar issues, but in very different contexts.