



Makassar, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Photo credit: Jhon Alfa Tumbelaka

Making Sanitation Services Affordable in Indonesia's Cities

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Wastewater should be managed well for a better quality of life," said Vice Mayor Syamsul Rizal in August 2015, as his city, Makassar, the capital of South Sulawesi, became the first in Indonesia's history to implement a regular septic tank cleaning service. Our city "should be at the forefront of good sanitation," he asserted. "It is meaningless to have a nice house when the environment around us is smelly."

Half of Indonesia's population now lives in cities — double the percentage of just 30 years ago. This demographic transformation has severely strained sanitation services. To address this challenge, USAID Indonesia's flagship water development initiative — the Indonesia Urban Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (IUWASH) project — has been prioritizing improvements to urban water and sanitation service delivery since 2011.

The USAID IUWASH program behind Makassar's historic milestone is the Regular De-sludging Service — a collaborative effort between USAID, the Government of In-

Indonesia, and various municipal governments that has been laying the groundwork for improved urban sanitation since 2012. Inspired by the De-sludging Service's success in Makassar, the city of Surakarta in central Java followed suit in October 2015, while other cities across Indonesia have shown an interest in introducing the service.

Improved Septic Tank Maintenance Promotes Healthier Communities

Though not glamorous, de-sludging is a vital component of any effective, long-term wastewater disposal scheme. Sludge is exactly what it sounds like — a muddy mix of fecal matter that accumulates in septic tanks over time. It must be removed periodically via vacuum pump and transported via truck to a treatment plant for permanent disposal, to ensure household septic tanks function properly.

Not only does regular de-sludging mitigate odor, it also reduces the likelihood of septic tank overflows or leaks, which can contaminate groundwater sources and accelerate the spread of waterborne diseases like diarrhea — an especially acute public health threat in crowded urban settings.

While more than 70 percent of households nationwide have access to basic sanitation, the proportion with proper disposal and treatment of wastewater are less than 10 percent due to lack of proper septic tanks and infrequent de-sludging. In all cities, including Makassar, residents tend to rely on expensive private operators that pump septic tanks only by request. Weak law enforcement, unreliable access to affordable sanitation services, and lack of public awareness about proper tank maintenance have meant households have not invested in better septic systems. Most do not request routine emptying because they have been unaware that their systems need to be de-sludged regularly.

In Makassar, IUWASH enlisted the city's wastewater management unit to implement the de-sludging program. Following a successful test run in 2013, the service is now ready to be scaled up across the city. To gain community buy-in, program implementers have started a robust public outreach campaign.

Residents have greeted the initiative with enthusiasm — particularly because of the considerable cost savings. Makassar resident Pujianto (Indonesians often go by one name) said he and his neighbors “immediately switched our septic tanks in our homes to national standard ones and also registered for the de-sludging service” after receiving information about proper septic tank maintenance. “I used to spend Rp 300,000 (US\$22) for a private de-sludging service; now I just need to pay Rp 12,500 per month (US\$1) and don't have to worry that my septic tank at home will overflow.”

Creating More Livable Cities

Since the service was launched in Makassar, 125 septic tanks have already been emptied, and it will eventually become mandatory for all Makassar and Surakarta residents to do the same. Capitalizing on this momentum, “the de-sludging service will be introduced in more than 20 cities by the end of 2016,” said Foort Bustraan, IUWASH's Deputy Chief of Party. De-sludging services will be implemented in more cities by 2019, with sewage disposal plans customized for each urban area.

Program architects are providing training workshops and deepening local partnerships with urban sanitation service providers, municipal governments, and the private sector. “We are very proud to be able to support this program,” said USAID/Indonesia’s former Deputy Mission Director Derrick Brown, at the launch in Surakarta. “It strengthens the ability of local governments, service providers, and the private sector to collaborate in serving the community and ensuring proper sanitation for the people of Indonesia.”

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Additional Resources:

- [USAID/Indonesia](#)
- [Indonesia Urban Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene \(IUWASH\)](#)

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