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The challenges of disaster governance in an Indonesian multi-hazards city: a case of Semarang, Central Java

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Abstract

The disaster risks have been increasing recently due to the emergence of climate-related hazards which cause problems especially in coastal cities. Although the risks are obvious, many cities in Indonesia do not seem to have enough capacity to cope with the challenges. The study is aimed to assess the current capacity of disaster governance in Semarang. It is argued that well-structured governance is still key issue in the city. By adopting qualitative approach and using institutional analysis as the main instrument, it is found that there are still gaps in the capacity among those who involve in that process.

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1. Introduction

Disasters have been global common issues and regular problems to many places all over the world. It seems that there is no single place secured from disasters, not even the places where historically have not experienced any event of disaster. For some places like those are located on the Ring of Fire belt (the country like Japan,

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Taiwan, Vietnam and Indonesia, for example), the disaster risk have become common and the people living in the areas are familiar with the hazard. Although the people have been having some degree of adaptation to disasters, there are many evidences that the number of people victimized by the disaster tends to increase over the time. There are bunch of evidences that people who live in coastal cities and regions are more vulnerable to disaster risk.

The level of vulnerability is increasing recently due the sea level rise as the impact of climate change. The countries which have a great number of coastal areas like Indonesia are really in the huge risk. In the case of Indonesia, the problems could be even more complex as the majority of big urban settlements are located in coastal areas, especially in Java Island which is the main center of national activities. Among the larger cities in coastal area of Java Island, Semarang is considered unique due to its physical characteristics. Despite its location on coastal areas, the city of Semarang is enriched with sloppy urban morphology in southern part of the city with some areas have a very steep slope. With this natural condition, the city has been long experiencing with potential multi-hazards risks. As the consequences, tidal floods, landslides, and land subsidences have made the city as regular disaster-prone areas. However, disaster events in Semarang are not only from natural factors. Rapid urbanization in the last two decades has created dense urban built environment which in some areas tend to be poor in terms of sanitation. This kind of urban habitat has been the cause of increasing number of dengue fever in the city. Based on statistical data, Semarang is the most dengue infected city as it records the highest dengue fever incidents in the last decade.

There are also an increasing number of fire incidents in the city, especially in the central part of the city where the building density is very high. Therefore, along with natural disaster risk, the city also has potential hazards that come from human activities. Although the risks of disasters are obvious, Semarang like other cities in Indonesia seems to be unprepared to reducing disaster risk, especially when it is related to the issue of governance. It is just recently that the city government established “Kelurahan Tanggap Bencana” (community disaster preparedness group), even though the needs to have such organizations have been advised widely (Suara Merdeka, 3 October 2014). When the last flooding hit the city in late 2014, there are some confusions among those involved in the disaster responses as there were overlapping and uncoordinated tasks between local government agencies. The study is aimed to assess the current capacity of disaster governance in the city. It is argued that well-structured governance is still key issue in the city. The rapid growth of urbanization in Semarang and its neighboring regions will increase the challenges for the government and other stakeholders to deal with the even greater risk of disaster. Therefore, the challenges are not only from within, but also related to the external factors. Having said that, the study will also elaborate the opportunities to develop more sound disaster governance which involves internal as well as external stakeholders. This article is divided into five sections. An introductory part starts the discussion by explaining the rationale behind the study. The second section discusses the theoretical framework and perspective used in the study. The following section describes the methods applied in the study. Research findings and discussion are elaborated in the fourth section. A brief summary and conclusions conclude this article.

2. Theoretical Framework

Aside from technical aspects related to disaster risk reduction, governance is widely advocated as one of key important factors to reduce risk of disasters (Gall et al., 2014). In its original meaning, governance can be described as the process in which there are communication, sharing, and coordination among stakeholders in the decision making process (UNDP, 1997). In the context of disaster risk reduction, as Tierney (2012, 344) points out, “disaster governance consists of the interrelated sets of norms, organizational and institutional actors, and practices (spanning pre-disaster, trans-disaster, and post-disaster periods) that are designed to reduce the impacts and losses associated with disasters arising from natural and technological agents and from intentional acts of terrorism.” This definition implies that disaster governance covers not only organizational level, but also the whole system (UNDP, 2007).

As other governance model, disaster governance also has comprehensive and integrated character. These characteristics involve participation of all parties involved in the management of disaster. The involvement of stakeholder participation is essential part of disaster governance (IPCC 2012; UNISDR 2005; UNISDR 2011). The second factor is cooperation and collaboration among parties regardless their position. Cooperation and collaboration should across scale and put away all barriers that may exist (Gall, 2014). The last element of disaster

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