

The deadly Cianjur earthquake: How's at fault line?

Have you ever felt trauma from a natural disaster? For many people in Cianjur, Indonesia, one small vibration can easily worry you which makes them [prefer to sleep outside](#) in the night. Government is aware that many parts of Indonesia are located in the "ring of fire," an earthquake disaster-prone area surrounding the Pacific Ocean. However, [334 victims](#) are very expensive proof that the government is not ready to mitigate the risk of disaster. **The government cannot prevent an earthquake to occur, but the government can and must prevent the collapse of man-made buildings and furniture, which is in fact the [main reason for death during an earthquake](#).**

Up until now, the government's Disaster Risk Management (DRM) has only relied on reactive action, such as creating a budget for extraordinary events and deploying military personnel to support the impacted area. This is the easiest path since, in many developing countries, [investment in prevention and risk reduction of disasters is insufficient](#). There is no formal public involvement in any way in the disaster resilience program, even though the key to reducing victimization is working together at the smallest community level. With limited emergency resources, the people that live closest to you are the ones who can react the fastest in an emergency.

Specifically for earthquakes, there is a regulation in place regarding building construction standards. However, this permit is more often only applied on top of the paper, or sometimes to big commercial buildings with a more expensive price tag. Another flaw in the process is the possibility of moral hazard between the design consultant team and the building owner that pays them. Another problem in the building permitting process is that actual construction often differs from the initial design that has been submitted. The government cannot supervise every building constructed due to limited resources, especially in a remote area like Cianjur district. Even government-owned buildings, [which should be more closely supervised during construction](#), cannot withstand the Cianjur earthquake. This explains a little bit about the quality of government-owned buildings.

This is a critical issue that must be addressed as soon as possible. An earthquake is just one of many natural disasters that can strike 276 million of Indonesia population at any time. There are many other possible disasters that should also be mitigated by the government, such as tsunamis, flash floods, seawater intrusion, land subsidence, forest fires, etc. Since some of these disasters

are directly related to global warming, they are projected to be more frequent and more adverse as the earth gets warmer.

This issue is very important to be disseminated and educated to all populations, even though everyone's participation is essential for building resilient communities. Some tsunami early warning devices have been stolen and broken apart, possibly to be sold as spare parts. This might also indicate poor supervision and a poor relationship between the community and the government. The local community should be involved to create a feeling of ownership over these equipment.

To resolve this issue as soon as possible, first, the central government should [involve all community members](#) in the DRM. The easiest way to involve community members is by adding this to the school curriculum and cooperating with academic institutions, possibly during physical education. Investment in community should be increased, more importantly to the younger generation. The government is the most important stakeholder that should take initiative because the private sector and NGOs do not have direct interest in this issue without any incentives.

In addition, the local government should really implement [all local regulations that have been stipulated](#) related to building permission. Corruption in this process can be reduced by automating the permitting process.¹ This will reduce the possibility of moral hazard between the design consultant team and the building-owner. This can also eliminate some duties of the government officer, which can be shifted to more supervision activities. A more susceptible building will be easier to find, and furniture placement can also be supervised.

To summarize, the government, both on the local and central levels, should be responsible for creating resilient communities. Local government should focus to reduce the practice of corruption, while central government should involve smallest community member in the DRM. The Cianjur earthquake that resulted in many victims is one proof of government inaction towards the real risk that many parts of Indonesia are facing.

¹ Related to course regarding Accountability, Corruption, and Automation