

Opinion

JakartaGlobe

It's Time to End the Police vs. KPK Saga

Well-known Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) investigator Novel Baswedan has filed a pretrial motion after he was arrested last week in relation to a ten-year-old legal case.

Lawyers for Novel filed their legal challenge at the South Jakarta District Court, which made headlines in February when Judge Sarpin Rizaldi, examining a similar motion, ruled in favor of Comr. Gen. Budi Gunawan, a former National Police chief candidate who had been named a suspect by the KPK for allegedly receiving bribes.

National Police detectives arrested Novel on Friday in connection with a case that has all the hallmarks of having been dug up to settle an old score.

The KPK investigator, a former policeman, has been accused of involvement in the death of an alleged thief in 2004 in Bengkulu. Novel has denied involvement and the family of the deceased has said the case was settled long ago and that they wouldn't want it to be reopened.

Police targeted Novel years ago when he was zeroing in on the head of the National Police's traffic division, Insp. Gen. Djoko Susilo. But Novel emerged victorious and Djoko was jailed for 18 years over the graft-ridden procurement of driving simulators.

Is the current investigation against Novel pay-back time or real concern for justice?

Judge Sarpin ruled that the KPK did not have the authority to investigate Budi, and it still remains to be seen whether the 'Sarpin Effect' can also work in favor of Novel. More importantly, however, President Joko Widodo should find a way to end the KPK vs. police saga once and for all.

Joko did the right thing by asking the police to release Novel, but a structural solution is needed — one that ensures that both the police and the KPK can do properly carry out their important task.

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Sustainability Erik Meijaard

The Great Conservation Fallacy: Counting on Community Wisdom

I generally get a fair few giggles out of reading the Jakarta Globe's Indonesia news. There were some pretty hilarious statements and comments recently about Indonesia's plans to ban alcohol consumption and how this would certainly not affect tourism. The idea that Jakarta would solve its traffic problems soon and that Jakartans would put up with it in the meantime was also pretty amusing. And then the proposal to make it even harder and less welcoming for foreigners to work here, and how this would not impact the economy and foreign investment; now that really cracked me up!

In my own field of work there have been some comical developments, too. One that I seem to increasingly encounter among writings of fellow conservation NGOs is a concept commonly referred to as kearifan masyarakat or community wisdom. It seems to refer to the idea that rural communities know much better than others how to sustainably manage their environments and natural resources. Reading some of the NGO texts, all we need to do is to let environmental decision-making be guided by these community folks, and all will be fine. What a total crackpot idea!

I think community wisdom is a complete fallacy. More importantly, I worry that this bad joke is undermining the effectiveness of conservation efforts.

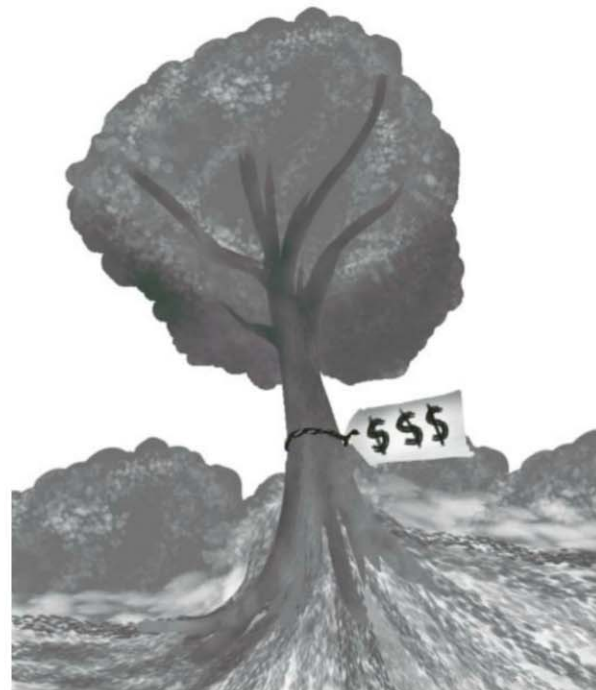
On exactly what information is the assumption based that local communities have the traditional wisdom, practices and altruistic interests to forego individual gain for greater communal benefit? As far as I am aware evidence points in exactly the opposite direction — communities are as unable to manage their environments sustainably as anyone else (urban folk, government institutions, industries etc.).

It doesn't take much digging in the literature about community resource use in Indonesia to find evidence of communities locally exterminating species (like tigers or warty pigs on Java, or rhinos, orangutans, crocodiles or expensive song birds in Kalimantan and Sumatra), or natural resources like Ramin wood, which had been virtually wiped out in the lower Barito region in Kalimantan by 1840, about 120 years before industrial-scale logging started. Similarly, unsustainable slash-and-burn agriculture had already turned large parts of the Kapuas and Barito basins into grasslands by the start of the 20th century.

Of course, the scale of environmental destruction significantly increased after the 1960s when the technological and financial means became available to exploit the natural resources in vast parts of Indonesia. This represents a scale difference though and not an essential difference between local communities and all the other people, businesses and institutions.

It seems pretty obvious that local communities are no wiser than any of us about the use of their environments. In fact, we are all pretty dumb if it comes to issues like sustainability. Who really knows how their individual actions (traveling, eating, consuming etc.) add up on the overall global environmental bill? I certainly don't.

Can we stop pretending that some people who live close to nature have magically acquired the skills and insights to control their individual actions for the common environmental good? It might



be a wonderfully romantic idea, but, as the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek said, it is rightfully referred to as "New Age B***it." In fact, as he points out the use of the idea is actually quite patronizing to those communities, treating them as primitive people, closer to nature than us, and not as misguided as us technology-influenced urban people.

Most anthropological and social research in Indonesia shows that the forest people of Kalimantan and Sumatra cannot wait to get out of the forest, get their kids to decent schools, access to good hospitals, and comfortable roads to drive bikes and cars on. If they are stuck in their environment, it is more often than not because they do not actually have the means to get out. As soon as someone strikes gold (literally, or maybe a village-head selling some land to mining or oil palm) these forest-loving people in harmony with nature are off into the provincial cities on the next boat, bus or plane.

Conservation in countries like Indonesia urgently needs better solutions. Environmental resources such as coastal fisheries and forests that protect watersheds are rapidly disappearing. And people are increasingly living in places that have become outright dangerous because of environmental mismanagement. It is undeniable that communities play a cru-

cial role in finding and implementing new solutions to the resource problems. But these problems are identified by what is called the "tragedy of the commons." We all need the resources but no one, neither communities, nor government, has a sense of ownership and acts accordingly responsible.

Effective solutions need a sense of the reality of the problems. What they do need is an ideological assessment of how we would like the world to be. Distorting the reality of how certain people relate to their environments is cynical. NGOs probably know quite well that it is not the social reality, but it serves their purposes of promoting a particular ideology and raise funds from community-loving donors.

Environmental and wildlife conservation in Indonesia might work one day when: 1) the government finally gets organized and enforces its own planning, rules and regulation; 2) large numbers of people are much better educated about the importance of functioning environments for their own well-being; 3) people become richer and have more certain rights to land and resources; and 4) Indonesia as a society decides that it wants to remain one of the most wonderfully species-rich places on Earth.

In the meantime we need to hold on to as much of Indonesia's natural environments and biodiversity as possible, until some enlightenment and capacity kicks in that allows the country to overcome its own tragedy of the commons. For this holding pattern to work we need solutions based on how the world actually functions. What we don't need is ideology and wishful thinking.

Erik Meijaard is a Jakarta-based conservation scientist.

“Local communities are no wiser than any of us about the use of their environments. We are all pretty dumb if it comes to issues like sustainability.**”**