(G)localizing Sustainable Action:
The Role of Online and Offline Networks in Indonesia

Context and Motivation

With only five years remaining to achieve the 2030 Agenda, accelerating local action on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has become increasingly urgent. Local communities play a vital role in sustainable development, and digital networks are transforming how collective action is mobilized. Understanding how offline and online networks interact is key to strengthening local agency in sustainability initiatives.

Indonesia offers a particularly relevant setting for this research. Its rich cultural diversity has fostered strong traditions of community organization, while the country simultaneously ranks among the world's most digitally connected nations. In light of these conditions, Indonesia's Digital Vision 2045 sets out to empower a digitally literate and participatory society.

This study takes SDG 14 - specifically targets 14.5 on coastal and marine protection and 14.2 on sustainable coastal ecosystem management - as its analytical entry point to explore how local and digital networks intersect in mobilizing collective sustainability action.

As one of the world's most biodiverse archipelagic states, Indonesia plays a central role in safeguarding our ocean as a global common good. Indonesia recognized the importance of local participation in achieving the SDGs in general and in protecting coastal and marine ecosystems. Accordingly, Indonesia's 2017 SDG Roadmap, emphasizes maintaining ecosystem health and strengthening community-based management of marine protected areas. Further, i n 2024, Indonesia signed a memorandum with the United Nations Environment Programme that commits both parties to closer cooperation on conserving coastal and marine ecosystems, strengthening resilience, and advancing sustainable ocean governance.

However, translating these ambitions into effective practice remains challenging. Environmental pressures affect Indonesia's coastal and marine ecosystems, and progress on SDG 14 remains off track.

Tourism, particularly in Super Priority Tourism Destinations, contributes to regional economic development but also creates environmental pressures, including plastic pollution, coral reef degradation, and coastal erosion. Balancing conservation objectives with economic priorities therefore remains an ongoing challenge, one that requires locally grounded solutions developed in close collaboration with civil society.

Research Questions

Against this background, the case study in Indonesia seeks to answer the following questions:

1 How do local civil actors mobilize collective action for environmental sustainability, particularly for marine and coastal protection (SDG14)?

2 What roles do offline community-based networks, local traditions and cultural contexts play in shaping such action?

3 How do digital networks influence sustainability action in different regional settings, and how does variation in factors such as connectivity and media literacy affect their functioning?

Methodological approach

The study adopts a mixed-method comparative subnational approach, focusing on three regions that share coastal and marine challenges but differ in cultural traditions, media habits, remoteness, and technological infrastructure. Primary data will be collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with key stakeholders at multiple levels.

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PGP | Postgraduate Programme for Sustainability Cooperation

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Calendar

Jakarta
Kick-off, 03–16 Feb

Manado
Field Research, 16 Feb–03 Mar

Lombok
Field Research, 03–17 Mar

Bali
Field Research and Writing Retreat, 17 Mar–18 Apr

Jakarta
Wrap-up, 18–26 Apr

About IDOS

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Research at IDOS is theory-based, empirically driven and application-oriented. It provides the basis for the consulting activities of the Institute. IDOS develops policy-relevant concepts, advises ministries, governments and international organisations, and refers to current policy issues. The training programmes of the Institute for university graduates and young professionals are integrated into the research and advisory process.

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