

# Unleashing Urban Ingenuity: Exploring Resourcefulness in Jakarta's Urban Dysfunction

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## Background

Tanah Merah, nestled on the fringes of North Jakarta, stands as a microcosm of urban fragmentation and administrative ambiguity. Its residents grapple with uncertain legal residency statuses. This predicament results in restricted access to essential services and inadequate infrastructure.

This study delves into the strategies employed by Tanah Merah's community members, exploring how they've harnessed scarce resources as a consequence of legal ambiguity, and create their own adaptive urban governance



Jakarta's urban sprawl. Source: Westend61.de

## Urban Fragmentation and Legal Ambiguity

Tanah Merah has been characterized by a legal dispute involving Pertamina, the state-owned oil company. This contention arose from the installation of a Pertamina oil depot in the vicinity during the early 1970s. Consequently, the oil depot's presence has engendered ongoing conflicts concerning land ownership, leading to a state of legal ambiguity for the residents. These legal uncertainties have further repercussions, as the government has refrained from providing access to basic services due to their perceived violation of official regulations of land titling.



Depo Pertamina Plumbang

The Pertamina depot is situated within the heart of the Tanah Merah village. Source: Google Map

The condition of legal uncertainty in Tanah Merah not only hinders effective urban governance but also presents obstacles to the implementation of development initiatives and equitable resource distribution. This contributes to a fragmented and unequal provision of services within the community.



A view of the Pertamina depot from the swamps of Tanah Merah village. Source: Rafael Martinez/LKYCIC

## Community Driven Urban Governance



The revitalisation of the Perjuangan Road was financed through tolls collected from passing vehicles. Source: Kompas.com



The leaders of Neighbourhood Units took the initiative to offer clean water, ensuring that residents can access safe drinking water. Source: Kompas.com

- **Emergence of Neighbourhood Associations and Community Units:** Facing administrative uncertainties and service gaps, Tanah Merah residents have established shadow Neighbourhood Associations (RT) and Community Units (RW). These administrative bodies facilitate local decision-making.
- **Alternative Decision-Making Structures:** These associations have introduced innovative decision-making processes that involve active participation from all community members. Through regular meetings and consultations, residents collectively decide on issues such as infrastructure development, waste management, and community events.
- **Resource Mobilization:** They have adopted innovative resource mobilization methods, such as implementing gate levies on vehicles passing through. These funds support community projects, infrastructure upkeep, and social welfare initiatives.
- **Collaboration with Local Authorities:** The United Tanah Merah Communication Forum (FKTMB), a community-political entity, acts as a liaison between residents and local authorities.



A social media update shared by the United Tanah Merah Communication Forum announces the enforcement of a COVID-19 lockdown. These local measures were initiated prior to the official government recommendations. Source: FKTMB Twitter Post



A makeshift bridge connecting kampung Tanah Merah with its adjacent upscale Kelapa Gading housing complex. Source: Rafael Martinez/LKYCIC

The informal governance in Jakarta's urban kampung arises as a direct consequence of the ambiguous residential status and government's gradual withdrawal from its traditional roles as service provider, revealing a significant deficiency in its ability to deliver adequate urban services. This withdrawal exacerbates the existing duality in land titling, further leading to a skewed pattern of development, contributing to the emergence of an uneven urban service provision.