



# Strengthening Local Governance in Indonesia

## Challenge

More than four years ago, in the wake of civil unrest that had forced its authoritarian president to resign, Indonesia enacted a sweeping law that gave many powers previously held by the central government to local administrations across the country. Public officials were told that, along with their added authority, they had to be accountable to their constituents. The first local officials in Indonesia's history to be popularly elected found that they had no experience in a system whose legitimacy is based on transparency and public accountability.



Photo: USAID/Indonesia

Pak Ismail, founder of the civil society organization Bina Swagiri.

## Initiative

To ensure that citizens' views are heard and their concerns addressed by local officials, USAID began providing assistance and training to help local civil society organizations (CSOs) in Indonesia become stronger and self-sustaining. Improved management and operations would contribute to these organizations becoming more effective at representing citizens and influential in dealing with governments at all levels.

Since its launch in 1999, the five-year program has awarded 69 grants. One grant recipient is Bina Swagiri, a CSO in the Tuban district of East Java that was set up by businessman and social activist Pak Ismail in 1982. Bina Swagiri helps villagers engaged in farming and fishing to become more effective in communicating their interests to public officials.

Elected officials, newly entrusted with the role of public servants throughout Tuban, turned to Bina Swagiri for advice on abiding by the new law. They wanted to know how to increase the input of their constituents in the drafting of government budgets, the funding to villages from the district government, and the writing of local business regulations.

## Results

Two years after receiving the first grant, Bina Swagiri now works with one-third of the 328 villages in Tuban. The program has helped village councils across the district implement regulations on the use of outdoor market stalls, water control for irrigation, and the dismissal of village leaders who break the law. Working with village officials has helped Bina Swagiri build a reputation for being honest and knowledgeable in government budgeting, which in turn has led to increased demand for the organization's input. The Tuban district's House of Representatives now turns to Bina Swagiri as a consultant to analyze its budget proposals, including how much money is allotted for government functions and how much is to be spent on public services.

