



# Suara Surabaya is not a radio station, it's a **social institution**

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Ruth Kronenburg is travelling to Indonesia to attend the GFMD Jakarta World Forum. She decides to take a detour for the popular community radio station and Free Press Unlimited project Suara Surabaya.

Suara Surabaya Radio, founded in 1983, is well known for the interaction with both the people of Surabaya as well as their government officials. I speak with Errol Jonathans, CEO of the popular radio station. Mr. Jonathans has been a journalist all his life. He is a very modest, good speaker and shows a lot of passion about the objective of the radio station: to bring people together and offer them a better live.

Dessi Damianova, Programme Coordinator for Free Press Unlimited, recommended me to visit Suara Surabaya, because it's a radio station to be proud of, with a strong vision and leadership. That alone triggered me enough to make a detour and stop by in Surabaya: I wanted to see this for myself. Surabaya is a big city with about 3 million inhabitants. During the day time this number even doubles, due to the commuters from the suburbs. And almost everybody drives a car or a motor. Can you imagine the traffic jam? Traffic in Surabaya is crazy.

According to a recent audience survey Suara Surabaya reaches over 600.000 people. When the radio station started, most existing stations targeted youth, with music and games for example. But there was not enough attention for in-depth information. Suara Surabaya filled that gap, and ever since became the 'talking' station. It is so popular nowadays that even officials like the mayor and police commander call in to comment on the issues addressed. And that is exactly what Mr. Jonathans envisioned when he started the station. He wanted to listen to the people and their problems but besides that, he also wanted to offer them solutions. This became the most important concept of the station.

Mr. Jonathans gives some examples. A couple of years ago the city was facing a garbage crisis due to the immense growth of the city, which the government simply couldn't handle. The station asked the locals what kind of problem they were facing, what they thought could be the solution and asked government officials to respond to these solutions. "But what strike me most", Mr. Jonathans says, "was that we even got callers from Sydney and California to share their solutions and the way their cities were dealing with garbage. It showed how far our broadcasts reach and how involved the public is." In the end, the system was improved and the garbage managed so much better.

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Surabaya is now one of the cleanest cities in Indonesia.

Another story of impact is that of the floods during the monsoon. Before, the streets could be flooded for days. With great consequences, like spreading diseases, animals seeking shelter in houses and even bigger traffic jams. Simply because the sewers couldn't handle so much rain in such a short time. Thanks to the broadcasts of Suara Surabaya the city council was able to identify where problems were the biggest, so they could be addressed first. The mayor explained live on the radio why it took time to deal with this problem, and by doing so, created a better understanding among the people. Nowadays during the monsoon the streets are flooded, but for a maximum of two hours, instead of days.

The station is a place where the locals feel free to go to. "Suara Surabaya is all about helping people, to talk freely, to give your opinion." says Mr. Jonathans. "Not just to criticize, but also to give a solution. That together makes the lives of everyone better. And that's why we're not just a radio station. No, we're a social institution." And this is exactly why we are proud to call Suara Surabaya partner of Free Press Unlimited. Because with partners like Suara Surabaya, we are able to achieve our objective: media as change catalyst to achieve an inclusive and just society. It was really an inspiring visit.



*Every now and then, Mr. Jonathans visits his sister in the Netherlands. But only if he can combine this with visiting the North Sea Jazz Festival.*

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