

# What if ...

- ▷ we could design our sustainable society together?

BRIEFING



**What if...**  
▷ **Lab**

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## **Introduction**

Are you working to make Indonesia greener, healthier, more equal, sustainable, future-proof? And do you have a challenge that needs new creative perspectives? Read more about this [What if Lab](#).

## **Design for a sustainable society**

The way we, as humanity, choose to live our lives today is causing the world to change at a fast rate. These rapid developments have global effects and create challenges for which plug-and-play solutions do not exist. So how do we move towards a sustainable society in which we can ensure the quality of living in the world of tomorrow?

## **Wicked Problems**

Sustainability encompasses far more than just environmental challenges like waste management, renewable energy, and CO2 reduction. It extends to how we live together, interact as humans, and create a respectful environment for future generations to thrive. These challenges often manifest as "wicked problems"—socially complex issues intertwined with other topics and dependent on various factors. Each problem has multiple facets and requires diverse perspectives to tackle effectively.

Transitioning towards a sustainable society involves embracing this complexity and diversity of solutions. It's about bringing together a broad spectrum of expertise and efforts from across society to amplify the impact of individual actions. By collaborating on the transformation towards a sustainable society, we can magnify the effects of even small changes.

Working towards a sustainable society means creating a future where environmental responsibility goes hand-in-hand with inclusive societies that respect human dignity and promote equality. It's a journey towards a better world, where every step towards sustainability—no matter how incremental—contributes to a more positive and resilient future for all.

## **Indonesia**

Indonesia, an archipelago with a rapidly growing population and economy, faces numerous sustainability challenges. These challenges are intertwined with the country's economic development, environmental conservation, and social well-being. Key areas of concern include waste management, energy transition, carbon emissions, air quality, water resources, and food security.

Addressing Indonesia's sustainability challenges should not be a burden the country faces alone. In our increasingly globalised world, challenges that were once addressed at a national level are now interconnected on an international scale. For instance, when we order clothes from Indonesia in the Netherlands, we must consider the sustainability of their production and social well-being of the workers who make them.

To work towards a sustainable and socially just world, collaboration and collaborative innovation are essential. By sharing knowledge, resources, and efforts across borders, we can tackle these complex challenges more effectively.

## **Collaboration**

The Embassy of the Netherlands in Indonesia and Dutch Design Foundation have been collaborating since 2018 by initiating intercultural programmes (*What if Labs*) that bring together Indonesian and Dutch designers to work on sustainability projects.

Dutch Design Foundation has found that, for the worlds of 'question holders' and designers to come together, they often need to learn to understand how to collaborate effectively and build on each other's strengths. Because designers are specifically trained to question the status quo and think in terms of possibilities, they can easily unearth new insights and opportunities. Organisations have the power to accelerate the outcomes of a Lab.

These collaborations involve different design phases, covering research, community engagement, workshops, design sessions, concept presentations and prototyping to develop innovative solutions. The results of these efforts are showcased in exhibitions, building strong partnerships and sharing creative strategies between the countries to sustainable development.

This way, we stimulate intercultural exchange and inspiration in the design world. Both designers can profit from each other's knowledge, craftsmanship, and experience. We believe that combining different

backgrounds will be complementary in solving issues that come from within the community and stimulate solutions that come from new perspectives.

### **What if Lab**

What if Lab structures the process of this collaboration and creates time and space to explore new possibilities. Based on a clear briefing, introductory meetings, sessions with experts or a master class, design studios start their work. Throughout the process, research and concepts come together, and ideas are validated and refined further based on feedback from the question holder. This process is supported by a specialised 'Lab Manager'. At the end of a What if Lab, designers present results and the question holder can test potential and impact for further development and implementation.

### **Previous What if Labs in Indonesia**

In 2018 the first installment of What if Lab: The Sustainable Society took place in Indonesia and the Netherlands. This programme brought together Indonesian and Dutch designers to collaborate on projects aimed at improving our world, travelling to Indonesia and the Netherlands to work together in five design teams. The collaboration resulted in five prototypes focused on clean air, education, co-creation, and biobased materials. The outcomes were showcased in two exhibitions in Indonesia, one exhibition in the Netherlands, and led to multiple follow-up collaborations and showcases.

In 2023, the second What if Lab took place, featuring a team of designers working on the question: What if...we co-created sustainable public spaces in Indonesia? The designers collaborated closely with residents of Kampung Kunir, a community that was evicted in 2015 and subsequently rebuilt as a new high-rise community. In the Lab, the designers developed strategies for residents to reconnect with natural elements in their environment and find creative ways to realise public spaces within the urban areas in and around the kampung. Through thorough research in Indonesia and the Netherlands, neighbourhood conversations, and workshops, the designers crafted and presented their strategy in an exhibition at Erasmus Huis and showcases at Kampung Susun Kunir. The results will also be exhibited at Dutch Design Week 2024 in Eindhoven.

### **What if lab 2025-2026 – An Open Call for projects**

For the upcoming edition of What if Lab: the sustainable society we are looking for local parties with sustainable challenges (question holders). You are looking for new creative solutions and want to collaborate with designers in the next What if Lab.

We invite Indonesian institutes, organisations, governments, companies, and individuals to share their concerns and goals for the future. We are looking for design questions and project proposals that address aspects of sustainability in the broadest sense, both environmental and social. Topics can include themes like Waste Management, Circular Economy, Renewable Energy, Air Quality Improvement, Water Management, Food Security and Sustainable Agriculture and Sustainable Urban Development.

After receiving your proposal, the What if Lab team, the Embassy of the Netherlands in Indonesia, and Erasmus Huis will interview multiple potential question holders to select a main partner for the lab.

Requirements of the design question:

- The question is linked to sustainable topics and has added value to society;
- The question is suitable for a design approach;
- The question holder is situated in Indonesia;
- The question holder has the means to take ownership of the outcome of this What if Lab after completion of the programme and work towards the implementation of the outcomes.

Three potential question holders will be invited for an interview, after which one question holder will be selected to participate in the Lab.

### **Programme set up and timeline**

What if Lab: Sustainable Society is a year-long programme aimed at developing and showcasing outcomes in both Indonesia and the Netherlands. The collaboration will be a mix of online meetings and on-location work. The team is expected to self-organise online collaboration, except for a series of scheduled update meetings and presentations that have been determined in the programme. We aim to create a team of 2 Indonesian designers together with 2 Dutch designers. Together they will work on the design question.

Dutch designers will travel to Indonesia as part of the programme, and Indonesian designers will travel to the Netherlands. Travel, accommodation, and a stipend for transportation, food, and drinks will be covered by the programme. The outcomes will be exhibited in Indonesia at Erasmus Huis.

#### **Open Call – Question Holder (21 October – 15 November)**

Institutes, organisations, governments, companies, and individuals are invited to submit their design questions via an open call, which will be active from 21 Oct to 15 Nov. The call will be communicated through the networks of the Dutch Design Foundation (DDF), the Netherlands Embassy in Indonesia, Erasmus Huis, and other relevant parties.

#### **Review & Interview of applications (15 November– 6 December)**

The applications will be reviewed by DDF, in collaboration with the Netherlands Embassy in Indonesia and Erasmus Huis, from 15 November - 6 December October. Interviews will be conducted during this period. In the week of 9 December, the selected applicant will be notified. This process may be expedited depending on the number of applications received.

#### **Co-creation of briefing (9 December – 20 January)**

Once the question holder is selected, the DDF team, in collaboration with the NL Embassy, will develop the question into a comprehensive project briefing. This briefing will outline the context of the question, the required design expertise, and a project timeline. This briefing will form the basis for the open call to select the appropriate Indonesian and Dutch designers.

#### **February – Open Call for Designers**

In Feb 2025, an open call will be issued for Indonesian and Dutch designers to submit their applications. After selecting the designers, DDF will host an online introduction to allow designers to meet the question holder and other involved parties. We aim to create a design team of 2 Indonesian and 2 Dutch designers.

#### **March 2025 – Project kick-off and Masterclass**

The programme will officially kick off in March with an online meeting where the question holder will present the local context. Additional Dutch and Indonesian experts will share their knowledge in a masterclass related to the design question. This will mark the start of the online work period.

#### **March – April – Online work period**

During the first online work period, designers will focus on understanding the context of the question, conducting desk research, and sharing their expertise. Regular update meetings with designers and the question holder will be organised to check progress, address questions, and facilitate connections.

#### **May 2025 – Travel to Indonesia**

In May 2025, the Dutch designers will travel to Indonesia for a 16-day residency to visit the question holder and collaborate with the Indonesian designers. The goal of the visit is to learn more about the local context and needs. This visit, organised by DDF with local assistance, will include a symposium at Erasmus Huis where the question holder will share the context, the designers will share their work and plans and network with local designers and partners.

#### **May – August Online work period**

The design team will continue working remotely during this period, focusing on developing their ideas and concepts. Regular update meetings will be held to monitor progress, address questions, and facilitate necessary connections.

#### **September 2025 – Travel to the Netherlands**

In Sep the Indonesian designers will travel to the Netherlands for a 7-day residency to collaborate with the Dutch designers, learn from the local context, and visit specialists and projects to further develop their ideas.

#### **October – December – Online Work Period and final presentation**

After the trip to the Netherlands, the design team (designers and question holder) will work remotely (digital meetings) on finalising their concepts and designs. Regular update meetings will continue, the production of prototypes will be started up and preparations for the exhibitions will take place. In the beginning of September a final proposition will be presented together with prototypes and a plan for the exhibition in Oktober at Dutch Design Week.

## **February - April 2026 – Erasmus Huis Exhibition**

The project will be translated into an extended exhibition at Erasmus Huis. This exhibition will be produced in Indonesia with help of the Erasmus Huis team. After the exhibition period at Erasmus Huis the possibility to re-exhibit the project at the location of the question holder can be explored

### **Why participate as question holder?**

Participating in the What if Lab offers a unique opportunity to collaborate with talented designers and experience the possibilities of design. This initiative allows you to gain new insights and explore innovative solutions for your design challenge. The programme is professionally managed by the Dutch Design Foundation and is connected to the extensive network of the Embassy of the Netherlands in Indonesia.

By participating, you will access a wealth of knowledge that designers can apply directly to your challenge. The outcomes will be showcased on an international stage as inspirational case. Designs and prototypes developed after the lab ends into real-world solutions, making a real difference towards a more sustainable future.

### **Who are we looking for?**

We are looking for question holders who are enthusiastic to commit to the What if Lab programme and invest time and energy in participation. Being part of an What if Lab requires a certain attitude: open and enthusiastic, curious and willing to actively engage in the design process. There should be space for self-reflection and willingness to question your own methods and protocols. The possibility to explore and experiment are core values within a what if lab and should be facilitated by a question holder.

### **What do we ask you to commit to?**

*Shared Ownership:* The question holder and designers will jointly own the process; Insights and experiences from the What if Lab will be shared openly. Question holders and designers will act as role models, sharing knowledge with others. Question holders are willing to involve their network and connect designers to relevant parties within the context.

*Staff Involvement:* Multiple people will be asked to participate in activities, meetings and design sessions. That means actively freeing up time to participate in the lab as part of the design team. The question holder should designate a contact person for the course of the lab who speaks English.

Participation is expected in:

*Design Activities:* Initiated by the design studio, these tasks can be performed on-site and involve attending meetings and work sessions.

*Update Meetings:* Regular online meetings to keep everyone informed.

*Commitment Period:* Participants should commit to the project timeline.

*Financially:* The programme takes care of the cost of the designer; they will receive a lump sum fee to participate in the project and cover travel expenses for the designers.

The project has a dedicated budget for materials to be used to create a prototype.

The question holder will not receive a financial contribution but will benefit from the design process and its outcomes. A financial contribution to the prototyping budget, if possible, would be appreciated. If the question holder wishes to join the residency programme in the Netherlands, travel costs will need to be covered by the question holder.

No prior design knowledge or experience is necessary, just an open and eager attitude.

### **How to sign up**

Registration for potential question holders is open from 21 October until 15 November 2024 via [this link](#). In the registration form, please provide the context of your design question, clearly explain its scope, and give background information about your organisation. You do not need to propose design solutions at this stage; this will be the responsibility of the designers. If applicable, you can upload up to five images. Selected question holders will be notified within two weeks after the closing of the open call.

### **Selection Process**

Registration closes on 15 November. A selection of applicants will be invited for interviews with the DDF team and the Netherlands Embassy between 15 November and 6 December. The winning applicant will be selected and informed in the week of 9 December. Applications will be evaluated based on context, topic, relevance, impact, professionalism, and other criteria. Please register via [this link](#).

**Questions?**

If you have any questions regarding this What if Lab, please contact the Lab Manager: Marleen Kokke, [Marleen.kokke@dutchdesignfoundation.com](mailto:Marleen.kokke@dutchdesignfoundation.com).

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