

*Working Paper*

**SEEKING NEW INNOVATIONS AS PART OF DEVELOPING THE POTENTIAL OF REGIONS**

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This paper was prepared for this forum based on my feelings of trust, that the countries of Asia have great potential of becoming a **selling power** when the world begins to agree on the global economy. The natural and cultural potential that can be derived from the many ethnic groups in Asia, can still be interesting to the world, if we are able care for and develop it well and truly in a way that gives results that can enhance the wellbeing of the community.

In the era of globalization which many countries have agreed will soon be declared, there will be activities between nations as though there were no borders. Cultural interventions from wealthier countries and continents can dominate other areas of the world and have various influences.

On the part of the countries, which do not, or do not yet, have determined rules in facing this possibility, there must of course be ways that are quick and effective so that in time they can balance the global trends and play an active role.

The world economic crisis, which happened several years ago, more or less affected countries whose livelihood still depends on other countries. The desire to be strong and to prepare various rules and expertise on the obstacles and problems in a country greatly wastes time, manpower and limited total funding. The increasing influence of economic weakness, which is widely impacted by various matters, hinges on the life of the nation, including the influence of social and political conditions, which are sensitive to the unity, and integrity of the nation.

The seething separatism in various countries of Asia, of course, causes great suffering to the communities in those localities as well as disturbing the potential for a strong new unified economy in the new era coming. Although they cannot be freed from the political policies of the respective countries, various approaches need to be developed to help provide solutions that will reduce imbalances.

However more than that, we also need to develop various ideas to increase well being.

Our country, Indonesia, is one among the countries of Asia in the middle of a condition that feels as if it has been drawn from above. Geographically located between two continents and two great oceans it is very strategic in the total of hundreds of islands that have great natural abundance. With a total population in excess of 200 million and dozens of ethnic groups, our country can be classified as having potential as a source of social and cultural livelihood that is significant in the Asian region.

As many already know, each province has its respective potential, so that significant foreign investment can be found in many outlying parts of the country. However because of the geographical extent of the country which is composed of many islands and the large population that needs to be served, not all parts of the country have been reached by good and equitable development since independence in 1945. This problem continues to be confronted by the Government of Indonesia from time to time and from one period to the next.

What is clear from outside is that economic decisions only concern the main cities and certain islands which are considered most strategic, either geographically or strategically. The expertise, which is greatly needed to develop the potential of this nation, is also mostly concentrated in areas where the economy is relatively strong, although the people themselves originate from all parts of the country and different ethnic groups.

A result of this inequality is that physical development in all areas is done according to a stereotype. This does not investigate and consider the potential of each different area and often fails to address the needs of the area.

When political policies change and the Central Government hands over powers to Provincial Governments through autonomy, Indonesia will enter a new act in the field of development. If beforehand, attention was given to the possibility of immediately entering the free world market through various international agreements such as AFTA, WTO, bilateral and multilateral agreements and others, more attention can now be focussed on the problems arising from the district autonomy policies. The euphoria of reform has also brought to this a new pattern, which is being drawn in the shape and form of democracy.

This has opened up opportunities to carry out changes and improvements to develop districts, which are already before the eyes and in the hands of the district communities. In handling their potential they can prepare in advance new tactical plans, so as to ensure that district growth and development flourishes.

The new rules on autonomy which were put forward in 2000, of course need to be completed and prepared in a final way so they can be utilized quickly and effectively in each district. The lack of preparation or lateness in anticipating the beginning of the role of autonomous districts has greatly determined the way ahead, whether it will succeed or alternatively create problems that cannot be controlled. Problems such as this are not impossible, remembering among others:

- Rules have not yet prepared that characterize the technical mould for the continuation of the autonomy rules that can still be interpreted from one point of view. Let alone the new districts and provinces, which do not yet have complete rules for the locality.
- The transfer to the districts of facilities and functions, which were previously managed by the central government, has not yet been completed.
- The skills and expertise needed to plan and develop the districts are still very limited.
- There are still not adequate budgets as base capital to commence a program of district development.
- The destruction of various potential resources of districts as a result of exploitation which up to now has not been handled in the interests of the districts.

It can be imagined just how busy we are in Indonesia at this time in a way that has perhaps happened in other countries too in the middle of a recession. On the other hand various excesses from the policies of development in the autonomous districts, are still very obvious. This also provides an opportunity to get hold of those same parties, especially those who are linked with role of development, who do not look carefully at their policies and lack forward vision.

Besides the problems of political and economic policies which underlay the final efforts for district development, it is very interesting to observe the role of those who have a role in development who have varied skills and expertise. As has already been written above, the distribution of skills and manpower is still very much concentrated in Jakarta. The tendency to tail whatever happens in metropolitan

Jakarta is often wrong, or not appropriate for the districts. Much that follows then, is very much felt to give results that are not based on the conditions and culture of the place, it has a temporary character. The openness of information, through the printed and electronic mass media, indeed greatly helps speed the information flow of knowledge about development methods, science and technology and influences changes in people's livelihoods. The community can very easily copy matters that are not fully appropriate or useful for themselves or their environment. Until in a short time one district will be the same as another district which has grown in an unplanned way and has no special qualities. The problems in one district will be no different from those of another, or one country with another, so that we will not profit from the coming global era. We will now be faced with problems of stiff competition to respectively promote the same commodities. Of course this will weaken the districts which lack strong capabilities.

In facing this phenomenon, besides needing various rules, experts will be greatly needed to direct the pattern of development so that it will truly and effectively give results to each district. In watching over the setting of district autonomy, experts must see an opportunity to point out that they can help with the districts. Not just, as in the past, only of their own private interests at the time, which can be labeled as treachery towards their native land. This is something that is still very much pointed to by the peoples of Asia in general.

The involvement of experts is something that is greatly needed in the development of regional autonomy at this time:

- As part of the role of the community together with the government, develop plans and guidelines that are most suitable to ensure that development proceeds directly and on track.
- As development motivators so that they can use their expertise to develop human and natural resources in the most effective and optimal way.
- As community experts in undertaking development professionally and fully responsibly, especially in protecting and developing the local culture which can be a source of pride and can be shown outside the district.
- They can immediately fill part of the shortages felt by the local government, in the framework of speeding up overcoming backwardness so as to undertake good autonomous district programs.

The abundant delegation of authority through the decision on district autonomy itself has already motivated people to develop the potential of the districts. But because these rules or policies are seen as new for the country of Indonesia, it is still thought to be imperfect and constricted because we lack experience and are indeed not ready.

How do we raise the motivation of districts that up to now have only followed policies from the center? Among others we can study the experiences of other countries. Even the pattern of study does not have to be the same as in the past, which used up a lot of expenses in overseas visits, but through using good communications between established experts both in professional associations and non-government organizations (LSM). If previously foreign experts who looked at the area were brought either by an investor or aid program, for those who come in the future, it is not impossible that they can help develop innovations in a district in cooperation with Indonesian experts in the same field.

Meetings such as the ASIAN FORUM, or those that are more specific such as ARCASIA (Architect Regional Council of Asia) and APPH (Asian Association of Planning and Housing), can be very useful when they can be continued through meetings with working groups especially to discuss development cases in Asia. The most useful approach at this time and in the future is felt to be the presence of special consultation forums and support in various forms from experts to countries that need it.

On the part of professionals such as architects, who in Indonesia are grouped in the organization the IAI (Institute of Architects of Indonesia); the opportunity provided by the commencement of District Autonomy is an opportunity to spread out their expert members back to their original districts. In the membership of the organization are architects who follow interests and activities that they have studied intensively. These start with problems of habitat, preservation of buildings and surroundings, the building environment, general construction, recreation and sports facilities, and much more that involves specific districts such as the issues of local traditional architecture.

Just suppose that, in a short time these architects with their interests could immediately take hold of the opportunities of regional autonomy and development.

Routine meetings would follow between Asian architects to discuss cases. Of course this role very much depends on the growth of the development potential in Asian countries. But we are sure that there are still enough such experts and other experts who care sufficiently about those underdeveloped districts in Asia that have potential.

In finishing this paper, we hope that this forum will not stop here but can be continued with other forums that more specifically discuss the problems in Asian countries that can be assisted. Actions continuing from this forum are very important, remembering that many development policies in autonomous districts such as in Indonesia continue to need support from experts and experienced countries.

