

UGM Observer: Decentralization and Regional Autonomy are not Sure Recipes for Development Disparities

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YOGYAKARTA- Since the New Order period, the pattern of development has very clearly shown its orientation on economic growth. Therefore, the regions that contribute to economic growth will receive first priority of development. Meanwhile, regions that are less supportive tend to be the way they are now.

"This has caused the widening disparities and ultimately became the fundamental problem of development in Indonesia during the New Order and even up to now," a member of faculty of Department of Sociology UGM, Drs. Suharman, M. Si said on a monthly seminar of Center for Rural and Regional Studies UGM on Thursday (15/9) afternoon.

Suharman exemplified one of the disparities is between Java and outside Java. Inevitably, since the colonial period, Java has become the center of economic activity, governance and all the activities, so, it is not surprising that Java is better prepared in a variety of things to develop. Outside Java (the outer islands) is an area that is less important, except at some points that have always been centers of economic activities while the rest and the large areas outside Java comprise the wilderness that have not enjoyed development.

"When the New Order came in there, there were more exploitations done than development in the regions," Suharman said.

The other disparity is found between villages and towns. Since the city becomes the center of economy, politics, governance, the city experiences a rapid growth due to development priorities



that support it, while the villages both in Java and outside Java are areas that do not get the 'cake' of development.

"Moreover, if we talk about the gap between the rich and the poor. We know that the poor receives the least droplets of development," he said.

In view of Suharman, the policy of decentralization and regional autonomy is not sure recipes for addressing the chronic problem of this development. In many areas which have great sources of income, there is no guarantee that the welfare of the community also increases significantly. Precisely what happens is the trend of increased misuse of the budget and the rampant corruption cases. Meanwhile, funding issue is far from the community's expectations because the proportion of officials' expenditure often dominates the budget from year to year.

"This would lead to the assumption that the corruption that was formerly committed in central government is now moving to the regions," Suharman said.

In the outer areas, infrastructure development in general receives less attention. This is similar to the development in education, health, development of SMEs, etc. The central government allocates budget to every Ministry to make developments in the outermost regions without full consideration and planning, whether the goods or activities suit the needs of local communities or in accordance with local conditions.

"There was the phone installation program, even community radio program, but since the opening of the program until now, the phone has never rung at all. Well, the problems of development, especially in the outermost regions, should be the central government's serious concerns," Suharman said.

In the same place, Alpius Sarumaha, S.H, M.H., Sub-division Head of Legislation, Secretariat of Regional Legislative Assembly of South Nias Regency, North Sumatra, mentioned the role of the Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Agency (BRR) after the 8.7 magnitude earthquake in Nias Island on March 28, 2005.

Alpius explained, the assistance of the Agency brought positive impact for development and at the same time also left some problems. The assistances distributed by the BRR was in form of equipment but no adequate training for users and no professional technicians; so, many medical equipments from several NGOs or other donors eventually become scrap metal.

"This is related to the BRR. When it comes to issues of transport and road facilities, there are not many facilities like the smooth roads in Java, that would link villages and villages with the town in Nias," Alpius said.

Alpius added that in the government sector, those who hold structural positions come from educational personnel more, causing shortages of professional educators in schools. Human resources in education and health sectors are also still inadequate, according to Alpius.

"Therefore, Nias Island needs help from various people, not only because it is preparing to be a new province, but it's that Nias is also part of the Republic of Indonesia," Alpius said.

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