

# Participatory Approach to Indonesian Rural Development in the Era of Reformation

Antar Venus

---

## ABSTRACT

*The approach used by the government for developing society both rural and urban for the last 30 years has been the mobilization approach with top-down communication patterns. This approach does not give a space to the people to participate in the development process. When people become critical and aware of their own rights, a democratic participation approach to the development is needed. Such an approach, called the participatory development approach, is assumed to be able to give a space to the people to participate and to decide what are the best for themselves. The implementation of this approach in Indonesia is appropriate due to the reason that such an approach is in accordance with the principle of social justice.*

---

“Development is a widely participatory process of social change in a society, intended to bring about both social and material advancement ( including greater equality, freedom, and other valued qualities) for the majority of the people through their gaining greater control over their environment”. (Rogers, 1976:10)

## Introduction

William Liddle (Budiman, 1994:504) has argued that the search for more egalitarian development policies in the third world countries like Indonesia is at an impasse. Liddle’s statement is more valid today than ever before as Indonesia enters a new era of reformation. This era is marked by the existence of openness, a clean government ideal as well as empowerment of the people in all aspects of life. As the Indonesian reform movement takes place, many experts have done their best to write reports or proposals for identifying, analysing and drawing contextual solutions regarding various development problems in Indonesia. None of the reports or proposals deals specifically with at-

tempts to create a new strategy for rural development.

This article is an attempt to propose a new approach for rural development which is suited to the commitment of reformation and is also applicable to situation in Indonesian .

As a result of 30 years development, Indonesia’s Rural people have changed in many aspects. They are now more educated. Most of them have completed their junior High school and a few of them have even reached graduate level. Their economic condition has also improved although it is not as high as that of urban people. Communication technology both printed and electronic now exist in rural areas and have had a

---

tremendous impact on the people who are now able to be critical and well-informed. Unfortunately the approaches used by the government for developing society both in rural and urban areas still *mobilisation approaches* with the top-down communication pattern as the main feature. In this approach every aspect of rural development is planned and executed by the government, and rural people just receive and follow instructions given by the government. This approach is still implemented due to the existence of three common assumptions:

1. Indonesian society, particularly rural communities, are assumed to be paternalistic societies that have to be stimulated and guided so that they can progress.
2. There is a strong belief that *mobilization and instructive approaches* are appropriate ways for developing rural areas.
3. Rural people are considered incapable of defining their problems and finding appropriate solution.

Budiman (1994) argues that these three common assumptions above are not valid, at least for the current situation. The existence of rural community reform movement in 1998 indicated that rural people had been changed. They have become critical, dynamic, and very aware of their local problems. They also call upon the government for participating in management for development activities which affect their lives. This phenomenon is described by Escobar's opinion (1994:5) as "the more prosperous and critical the society becomes the higher their wish to participate in developmental process." The same idea is proposed by Eisenstadt (1986:15) who states that one of the feature of modern society is the existence of the need to participate in the developmental process.

A development pattern which was centralistic, not transparent and undemocratic was employed by the previous government and did not give space for people, especially rural people, to participate. In the new era, it seems very important for the government to create new development approaches.

This article seeks to examine the essence of

rural development, define new approach for promoting democratic development and finally give some recommendations in order to employ the new approach.

### **The Essence of Rural Development**

A National Socio-Economic Survey conducted in 1996 also showed a significant improvement with national economic growth increasing at 7.5% per year. Indonesia's GNP income per capita has also been raised to US \$1080. This achievement has improved the quality of life of Indonesian people and it has also convinced the government that the development approaches implemented have been successful.

Economic crises and later social, economic, and political crises emerged in beginning of 1997 have destroyed such conviction. The *Badan Perencanaan Pembangunan Nasional* (National Development Planning Agency) found some weaknesses in the existing national development policies (Gatra, 1998);

1. There is a huge gap in income distribution. Even though Indonesia's GNP per capita in 1996 reached US \$1080. However in the rural areas most people's per capita income is still below US \$350.
2. Investments and economic activities are centralized in urban areas, more specifically in Java Island's urban areas. In this case 80% of investments are on Java island.
3. Development activities have emphasized economic aspects and relatively neglected other aspect such as social, political, and law development.
4. The people's opportunities to participate in the development process has been very limited due to the centralization of power on the government. So the development pattern applied was *Top Down Approaches* combined with the mobilization of people.
5. High rates of corruption, collusion, and nepotism exist in every level.

The five problems mentioned above principally reflect an undemocratic development which did not give opportunities to people (both rural

---

and urban people) to participate in planning, implementing, controlling, and evaluating development activities.

Reform movement taking place some years ago was a reflection of the people's dissatisfaction with *the undemocratic development* where the government has considered itself all knowing, defining, and directing solutions to social, economic, and political problems and other developmental aspects.

In order to balance the whole developmental aspects of society economics, and politics, it seems that a democratic participation approach to development is needed. Such an approach is assumed to be able to give "space" to people to participate in the development process either at national level or more specifically in rural development.

Lele (1975) defines rural development as an improvement in the living standards of the mass of low income population residing in rural areas and making the process self-sustaining. In Indonesia, from Pelita / Five-years Development planning I (1969-1974) to Pelita VI (1994-1999), rural development programs cover physical, economic, social, and health development.

The execution of such a program by the government has never involved local communities. Conditions in Indonesia are similar with the typical model of *Top Down development* pattern as described by Korten (1980:482).

1. Program were implemented centrally through standard bureaucratic agencies. Program and their objectives were set from above without consideration of the ability or willingness of the people to respond to them with the result that often little participation occurred. When working with community members, the village worker eventually found himself directing projects.
2. Little effort was given to developing community controlled association that would be capable of solving local problems and making demands on the larger political system.
3. Program designers failed to consider the significance of village stratification; thus no attempt was made to change existing power re-

lations which were accepted as a given. Furthermore, field workers depended for assistance on village elite for assistance. They consequently monopolised project benefits to the detriment of the poor majority who were the intended beneficiaries of projects. In general, local level conflicts of interest were not regarded as significant on the assumption that communities had common felt needs that everyone would cooperate to meet.

4. Greater emphasis tended to be given to extension of social services than to increasing economic production or income, which would have been of benefit to the people, and many of the services provided were of questionable value.

### **Participatory Development Approach**

Participation has emerged as the key concept, being of considerable important to development. Okamura (1986:8) states that participatory approaches have become increasingly widespread in development programs in the past decade. Participatory development would seem to be particularly appropriate for developing countries given their limitations in government resources and personnel.

In Indonesia such an approach is not totally new, since then early 1980's participatory approaches have been discussed by sociologists such as Arief Budiman (Zulkarimein, 1988). Some Non-Government Organisations Including *Yayasan Ilmu-ilmu Sosial* (YIIS) and *Bina Swadaya* also have employed the participatory approach in their rural community employment projects (Budiman, 1994:301). However such efforts did not get any support from the government. The Government continued employing *Mobilisation and instructive approaches* which place rural people in a passive role. The government considered rural people to be incapable of taking part in development processes as they lacked education and the skills required.

Budiman (1994) believed that mobilisation approach was an outdated model of development and it was no longer suitable to apply in Indonesia

---

since rural people had become critical, educated, and also aware of their own problem. Therefore the most appropriate approach to the current development situation in Indonesia is a **participatory approach**. This approach is also in accordance with the principle of social justice in Pancasila (the way of life of the Indonesian). Besides such an approach also fits in with the *gotong royong* (cooperative) principle which is the main feature of Indonesian rural communities lives.

In the participatory development approach rural people are given opportunities to be involved in the entire developmental process which will affect their lives. Okamura (1986) stated that through the participatory approach people will have a sense of belonging toward the development projects and as the result the project will be sustained.

Chopra (1990:18) defined participatory development as a new socio-economic force aiming for sustained development at the local level. Other definition given by Cohen and Uphoff, (1977:6) stated “with regard to rural development, ... participation includes people’s involvement in decision making process; ... their involvement in implementing programs and decisions; ... their sharing in the benefits of the development programs; and/or their involvement in efforts to evaluate such programs.

Ramanamma (1993:160) said that the aim of participatory development is redistribution of resources and decision making powers. Therefore government must allow ordinary citizens to have more opportunities to speak about their own lives. Emphasis of such approach is on the ideal of self-reliance, on the availability of natural and human resources, and on the ability of individuals to define developmental problems, set goals, and make decisions independently and in accordance with their own social and cultural ethos. It should be kept in mind that participatory development should start from the planning stage of development efforts and continue through all stages of implementations, monitoring and evaluation.

The implementation of participatory development in Indonesia is appropriate due to the reason

that such approach is in accordance with the principle of Social Justice in *Pancasila* (the Indonesian Way of life) and also with the principle of *Gotong Royong* (cooperative) which the main feature of rural Indonesia communities. Besides, Osteria and Okamura (1986) also mentioned that for developing countries including Indonesia the most suitable strategy in developing rural area is a participatory approach. Such approach is believed to be able to create a better and more democratic model of rural development due to several reasons:

1. The participation of people in the institutions that govern their lives is a basic human rights and a basic need which is essential for effective rural development programs.
2. The poor comprise the majority of the population in Indonesia, but they have little say in the forces that affect their lives.
3. People know best what is good for them, and the poor represent a wealth of human resources in terms of labor, practical knowledge, experience and ideas. Development projects will be better maintained and sustained if community members contribute to their design and implementation.

Although Costillo (Osteria and Okamura, 1986) criticised the effectiveness of participatory approach by arguing such an approach is inefficient as it consumed a lot of money and time with unpredictable results. However the research results conducted in some developing countries such as Philippine and India are satisfied. Okamura (1986:11) said that “If a participatory approach were applied consistently sustained development can be achieved”. From their investigation regarding the implementation of participatory strategy in various countries, Cornell Rural development committee reported that “our overall conclusion is that participation is possible and under many conditions, desirable to achieve the development goal set by government and rural community” (Uphoff et.al, 1979:284).

To implement a Participatory approach in Indonesia it is necessary to involve other parties such as mass media and Non-governmental

---

organisation (NGOs). In order to be effectively applied, various local institution such as Lembaga Ketahanan Masyarakat Desa (Village Community Resillience Institution), Lembaga Sosial Desa (Village Community Institution), Nahdlatul Ulama (Religious Teachers Association) and Tokoh masyarakat (Opinion Leaders) as well as Penyuluh Lapangan pemerintah (Official Extension Agents) must be reoriented, revitalised and upgraded first.

### Recommendations

Based on the description above it is necessary to propose some recommendations as follows:

1. Rural Development must be put in the top-most priority by *the Reformation Government* since majority (70 %) of Indonesian live in rural areas and indeed they are the backbone of national economic.
2. To give a maximum benefit of development to rural community, it is necessary to change the development approach from the *mobilisation approach* to the *participatory development strategy*. This new approach is believed to be able to create a better and more democratic model of Indonesian development.
3. The participatory Development strategy should be implemented in a consistent way in which rural people are given opportunities to involve in entire developmental process starting from planning stage to implementation and monitoring and finally participation in evaluation stage.
4. A participatory development approach needs to be implemented through a democratic communication which is underpinned by the spirit of egalitarianism and the principle of cooperation.
5. To support the effectiveness of participatory development approach, the existing local institutions such as Lembaga Ketahanan Masyarakat Desa (Village Society Resillience Institution), Lembaga Sosial Desa (Village Social Agency), Nahdlatul Ulama (Religious Teachers Association), Tokoh Masyarakat (Opinion Leaders) and Penyuluh Lapangan

(Development Extension Agents) must be re-oriented, reorganised and revitalised so that such institutions become independent and professional.

6. In implementing the participatory approach it seems very necessary to cooperate with Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) which have a lot of experiences in conducting participatory projects at local level.
7. Mass media have a significant role in applying a participatory development. therefore mass media either printed or electronic must be used by the government in disseminating various policies and developmental information to rural people. This is important to secure people involvement and cooperation in the development operational level. The process of rural development can be expedited with the active participation of the enlighten rural people.

Indonesia has entered the era of reformation which is marked by the spirit of egalitarianism, openness, and a clean government ideal. In this era people both in rural and urban area will be empowered so that they can become critical, creative and independent in dealing with their own local problems. It is believed that the most appropriate strategy to realise this goal is the **Participatory Development Approach**. This strategy is only likely to be employed if there is a political sphere and political will on the part of government. ❷

### References

- A World Bank Country Study. 1990. *Indonesia: Strategy for A Sustained Reduction in Poverty*. Washington DC: The World Bank.
- Alfian. 1986. *Tranformasi Sosial Budaya dalam Pembangunan Nasional*. Jakarta:UIP.
- Budiman, Arief. 1994. *State and Civil Society in Indonesia*. Clayton: Monash University.

- 
- Bunge, Frederica. 1983. *Indonesia: A Country Study*. Washington: Department of Army USA.
- Chopra, Kadekodi and Murty. 1990. *Participatory Development*. London: Sage Publications.
- Cohen, John M & Norman T. Uphoff. 1977. *Rural Development Participatory: Concept and measures for Project Design, Implementation and Evaluation*. Ithaca: Cornell University.
- Eisenstadt. 1966. *Modernisation: Protest and Change*. Sydney: Prentice-Hall.
- Elderige, Philip. 1994. *NGOs and The State in Indonesia*. in Budiman, Arief. *State and Civil Society in Indonesia*. Clayton: Monash University.
- Escobal, Arturo. 1994. *Encountering Development*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Gatra. 1998. *Tantangan Pembangunan Indonesia*. Jakarta: PT Tempo. Agustus, 1998.
- Jayasuriya, L and Lee, Michael. 1994. *Social Dimensions of Development*. Western Australia: Curtin University of Technology.
- Korten, David C. 1986. *Community Organisation and Rural Development: A Learning Process Approach*. in Okamura Y. Jonathan. *Participatory Approaches to Development: Experiences in the Philippines*. Manila: De la Salle University.
- Lele, Uma. 1975. *The Design of Rural Development Lessons from America*. Ballimore: John Hopkins Press.
- Nair, KS. and White S.A. 1993. *Perspective on Development Communication*. London: Sage Publications.
- Okamura Y. Jonathan. 1986. *Participatory Approaches to Development: Experiences in the Philippines*. Manila: De la Salle University.
- Saha, R., G.P. Ghosh, and P.B. Roy. 1993. *Role of Libraries in Rural*. in Nair, KS. and White S.A. *Perspective on Development Communication*. London: Sage Publications.
- Sinha, P.R.R. 1976. *Communication & Rural Change*. Singapore: AMIC.
- Uphoff, Norman T., Cohen. J., and Goldsmith. 1979. *Feasibility and Application of Rural Development Participation : A State of Art Paper*. Ithaca : Cornell University.
- Windahl, S., Signitzer, B.H., & Alson, T. 1992. *Using Communication Theory*. London Sage.