



Mapping Spaces For Democratic Participation In South Aceh Indonesia

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GLOSSARY AND ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Adat</i>	custom, customary law
APBA	<i>Anggaran Pendapatan Belanja Aceh</i> , Aceh provincial budget
<i>Bappeda</i>	<i>Badan Rencana Pembangunan Daerah</i> , Indonesian Regional Body for Planning and Development
BKPG	<i>Bantuan Keuangan Peumakmoe Gampoeng</i> , Aceh-specific village development funds
BPS	<i>Badan Pusat Statistik</i> , the Indonesian Bureau of Statistics
<i>Bupati</i>	Head of Administrative District
DPRA	<i>Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Aceh</i> , Aceh Provincial Parliament
DPRK	<i>Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Kabupaten</i> , District Council
Forum KKA	<i>Forum Komunikasi Pemerintahan Kabupaten/Kota Se-Aceh</i> , Aceh Districts' Coordination Forum
GAM	<i>Gerakan Aceh Merdeka</i> , Free Aceh Movement
GIZ	<i>Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit</i> , the German Society for International Cooperation
<i>Golkar</i>	<i>Golongan Karya</i> , an Indonesian national political party
HKTI	<i>Himpunan Kerukunan Tani Indonesia</i> , an Indonesian farmers' association
<i>Kabupaten</i>	Administrative district of Indonesia
<i>Kecamatan</i>	Administrative sub-district of Indonesia
<i>Keujruen Blang</i>	customary irrigation expert in Aceh
KPA	<i>Komite Peralihan Aceh</i> , Aceh Transitional Committee
KTNA	<i>Kontak Tani Nelayan Andalan</i> , Indonesian national farmers' association
LoGA	Indonesian Law on the Governance of Aceh in 2006 that determines the self-governance of Aceh within Indonesia
<i>Madrasah</i>	an Islamic boarding school
MoU	Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement
MPD	<i>Majelis Pendidikan Daerah</i> , district education council
MSY	the maximum sustainable yield
<i>Musrenbang</i>	<i>Musyawarah Rencana Pembangunan</i> , Indonesian governmental participatory system of public expenditure planning
NGO	non-governmental organisation
PA	<i>Partai Aceh</i> , Aceh Party, a local political party in Aceh
PAN	<i>Partai Amanat Nasional</i> , The National Mandate Party, an Indonesian national political party
<i>Panglima Laot</i>	Sea Commander, a customary authority position in Aceh in charge of fishing
PD	<i>Partai Demokrat</i> , The Democratic Party, an Indonesian national political party
<i>Perkebunan</i>	plantation agriculture
PKPB	<i>Partai Karya Peduli Bangsa</i> , The Concern for the Nation Party, an Indonesian national political party
PKPI	<i>Partai Keadilan dan Persatuan Indonesia</i> , Party for Justice and Indonesian Unity, an Indonesian national political party
PKS	<i>Partai Keadilan Sejahtera</i> , The Prosperous Justice Party, an Indonesian national political party
PNPM	<i>Program Nasional Pemberdayaan Masyarakat</i> , the Indonesian National Programme for Community Empowerment, initiated and supported by the World Bank
PPP	<i>Partai Persatuan Pembangunan</i> , The United Development Party, an Indonesian national political party
PRA	<i>Partai Rakyat Aceh</i> , Aceh People's Party, a local political party in Aceh

<i>Qanun</i>	Aceh bylaw
<i>Reformasi</i>	Reform period in Indonesian history after the Asian financial crisis in the late 1990s and the fall of the New Order regime
SBSI	<i>Serikat Buruh Sejahtera Indonesia</i> , an Indonesian national labour union
SIRA	<i>Sentral Informasi Referendum Aceh</i> , Aceh Referendum Information Centre in the late 1990s; or <i>Partai Suara Independen Rakyat Aceh</i> , The Independent Acehnese People's Voice, a local political party in Aceh since 2008

PREFACE

The mandate of the Swedish International Center for Local Democracy (ICLD) is to contribute to poverty alleviation by promoting local democracy and local development. In order to fulfill this mandate we offer, decentralized cooperation through our Municipal Partnership Programmes, capacity building programmes through our International Training Programmes and knowledge management through our Centre of Knowledge. The Centre will document and publish key lessons learned from our ongoing activities, initiate and fund relevant research and engage in scholarly networks, organize conferences and workshops, and maintain a publication series.

This report *Mapping Spaces for democratic participation in South Aceh, Indonesia* by Leena Avonius, Olle Törnquist and Fadhli Ali is the third report to be published in ICLD's Research Report series. Avonius et al examines to what ex-

tent democratic local governance reforms have become effective and visible in the South Aceh district in Indonesia. The study seeks to answer if, and to what extent, people in South Aceh are given an opportunity to participate in decision-making processes. But it also seeks to shed light on how those opportunities, if present, are taken advantage of. How and to what extent do ordinary people participate?

As the study rests on an action-theoretic framework, it has a further aim of suggesting ways to foster appropriate institutions as well as methods for strengthening the capacities of key actors.

By reading this report you will gain insight into a critical question applicable to local governments beyond the studied case: where do people go when they have a problem they deem to be of common concern? Are local governments the answer?

Visby, Sweden February 2014

Maria Åberg
Secretary General

AUTHORS' BIOGRAPHY



Leena Avonius is Senior Anthropologist who worked in 2008-2011 as the Founding Director of the International Centre for Aceh and Indian Ocean Studies (ICAIOS) in Banda Aceh, Indonesia. Her research work focuses on human rights, indigenous peoples rights, peace and conflict,

and socio-political transformations in the Southeast Asian region. Since defending her PhD at the University of Leiden in the Netherlands in 2004 she has worked in Finland, Indonesia and Georgia both in academic and non-academic positions.

MAPPING SPACES FOR DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION IN SOUTH ACEH, INDONESIA

LEENA AVONIUS WITH OLLE TÖRNQUIST AND FADHLI ALI¹

Participation of citizens in decision-making on matters that concern their living environment and communities, be it through school committees, village councils or municipalities, is a key aspect of local democracy. Yet such participation is often difficult and problematic. In many parts of the world issues that people deem to be of common concern are in fact controlled by private actors or organisations rather than by public institutions. Furthermore, nationwide top-down models in the fields of education, health, livelihoods and infrastructure often ignore local circumstances that call for specific, tailored solutions. Decision-making without participation of local population is also more likely to become tampered by corrupt practices if “citizen watchdogs” do not observe it. Individuals with “good connections” benefit from the programs, but vulnerable families are left out. Projects that are implemented in a top-down manner and without support amongst local population run a risk of becoming neglected as feeling of local ownership amongst beneficiaries is missing.

This research paper explores the problem described above. It examines to what extent democratic local governance reforms have become effective and visible in South Aceh, one of the twenty-three districts of Aceh province, Indonesia. It seeks to answer the question of to what extent and how people in South Aceh can and do participate in decision-making processes of the local government. The project this report is based on used the term “spaces for democratic participation” rather differently from what it commonly refers to in political geography, which are public places that become arenas for political action. Rather, in this project, the term “spaces” is understood to refer to opportunities for people to participate; are ordinary people included in/excluded from organised politics and public administration and if so at what level (central, regional, local etc.), what are the chances for people to

mobilise and organise themselves to participate in public affairs, and what are their capacities to do so?

The research report at hand is based on a research project conducted by the Aceh Institute and the International Centre for Aceh and Indian Ocean Studies (ICAIOS) in 2010-2011. The Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD) funded the research team’s work in Aceh, and the project Advisor Olle Törnquist’s work was primarily financed by the University of Oslo. The project explored participatory aspects of local democracy in Aceh and some major challenges in South Aceh for people’s participation in local decision-making processes. The research design and analysis has been guided by comparisons between the primary research data collected in South Aceh and examples on experiments on local democratisation in other world regions.¹

In many parts of the world existing forms of participation tend to be based on prevailing unequal power relations rather than fostering more democratic representation and facilitating coalitions for inclusive economic development. During the last decades, however, there have been exciting experiments in, for example, Brazil and the Indian state of Kerala to develop more inclusive and dynamic development by the way of local democratisation (Harriss, Stokke & Törnquist, 2004; Heller, 2001; Stokke & Törnquist, 2013; Törnquist, Webster & Stokke, 2009). These

¹ Dr. Leena Avonius is a senior Social Anthropologist and former International Director of ICAIOS. She was the Team Leader of the research group of this project. Fadhli Ali is Researcher at the Aceh Institute. The information for this report has been attained from the studies conducted in South Aceh by Fadhli Ali, Saiful Mahdi, Zubaidah Djohar and Teuku Kemal Fasya. Olle Törnquist’s has served as academic advisor within his position as Professor of Political Science and Development Research at the University of Oslo and as (until recently) member of the Advisory Board of the Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD); his role has been vital for the research process as well as for preparing this report.

encounters have been important sources of inspiration for the present project; yet the project has most explicitly drawn on a third set of experiences – the historical Scandinavian democratic politics and policies towards inclusive growth. These practices occurred well before Scandinavia became a showcase of growth and democracy. It is true that some of the structural conditions in Scandinavia were unique, but much of the positive outcomes were due to political action and policies. For instance, in Scandinavia the unique trust in comparatively effective and non-corrupt public institutions, which today is deemed a precondition for local participation, was not due to a well-organised state and government. Rather, it resulted from wider public engagement and institutionalised forms of issue and interest-based representation since the late 19th century and especially since the 1930s. Similarly, the generation of social growth pacts from the 1930s and onwards were not primarily a result of given structural and historical conditions but came about largely through the fostering of well organised employers and labour organisations and the facilitation of agreements by government engagement in industrial and welfare policies. Obviously, the transformative practices and strategies cannot be copied, but they may serve as a point of departure for fruitful reflection over time and space (Stokke et al., 2013). Moreover, the research project this report is based on was meant as a pilot case for how possible cooperation between Scandinavian and Indonesian municipalities might facilitate democratisation for inclusive development at both ends, by the way of best possible knowledge of local problems and options.

The report first outlines local governance reforms in Indonesia and discusses Aceh's special status within the world's fourth most populous country. After three decades of civil conflict that ended in 2005 in the signing of Helsinki peace agreement between the Indonesian Government and Free Aceh Movement (GAM) Aceh has been granted a special status within Indonesia. Due to this, Indonesian regional autonomy laws that determine local governance are effective in Aceh only in the matters that the Law on the Governing of Aceh do not cover. As can be seen in the following sections, years from the peace agreement and conflict-related politics still appear to prevail

in Aceh. The second part of the report describes the research project and explains to the reader why South Aceh was selected as the focus area for the research. Before discussing in detail the research results the report provides more general information on South Aceh.

The key findings can be summarised as follows. Many problems in the local governance of South Aceh district are common to Indonesian districts rather than specific to the studied area; Indonesian regions suffer from an ever-increasing numbers of government officials whose salaries consume most of the local government budgets; corruption and malpractices hinder realisation of good initiatives; and opportunities for people's participation are limited at best. However, some of South Aceh's problems appear to be related to the long civil conflict, for example large land areas that were left uncultivated during conflict years have not been taken back into production due to lack of supporting communal infrastructure and capital. Aceh's post-conflict political atmosphere continues to be influenced by conflict politics, which is reflected for example in the ways the public funds are allocated in South Aceh. Despite the wide range of problems brought up by the research, there are also positive signs in South Aceh's local government that encourage the research team to conclude that many of South Aceh's problems could be handled by bringing together government officials, experts, interest-based associations and producers to find solutions to specific, clearly defined problems. The recommended solution is surely not new; rather it shows that there are no tricks or shortcuts to the genuine democratic practices that also once in history enabled Scandinavian countries to build up strong local governments

DEMOCRATIC REFORMS IN TRANSITION

In 1998 Indonesia changed course in terms of governance and centre-regions relations. In the aftermath of the fall of Suharto's three decades of centralised rule Indonesia entered the so-called *Reformasi* period. The era of reforms brought about decentralisation processes both in terms of political decision-making and economy. Consequently Indonesia has fundamentally changed

Level	Executive	Legislative
National level	President / Vice President	National parliament (DPR)
Aceh province (given special status by LoGA)	Governor / Vice Governor	Provincial parliament (DPRA)
Districts (kabupaten)	Bupati / Vice Bupati	District Council (DPRK)
Sub-districts (kecamatan)	Camat (not elected)	-

Table 1.
Indonesian Government Structure.

during the post-Suharto era. The 1945 Constitution, previously deemed as untouchable, has been amended four times since 1998. Election laws, as well as laws on political parties, parliaments and district councils have all been revised to better match democratic principles. Numerous new state institutions have been established to guarantee that the rule of law and democratic principles in governance are followed: these include the Constitutional Court, the Judicial Commission, Anti-Corruption Commission and Commission for Child Protection.

Indonesian districts (*kabupaten*) and villages were empowered through decentralisation laws in 2001.² These laws provided wider authority to districts in decision-making and development, in financial matters and over natural resources. Many have assessed positively Indonesia's decentralisation process that is often referred to as a "Big Bang" yet rapid decentralisation has not taken place without problems. Decentralisation policies have not necessarily led to improved public services, administrative efficiency, higher level of participation or less corruption. According to empirical studies as well as evaluations conducted by the Indonesian Department for Home Affairs, some Indonesian districts have successfully implemented regional autonomy laws and show better public services and growth in terms of development, while other districts – and according to some these would form a majority amongst Indonesia's five hundred

districts – have performed less well or even poorly.³

Local governance in many Indonesian regions is yet to become professional, effective, efficient and credible. There are at least two reasons for this. First, democratic principles that have been put on paper in laws, regulations and new government structures have not necessarily been implemented well in the society. Some problems related to poor implementation will also be brought up when the case of South Aceh will be discussed below. Second, policies that have been put in place during the reformation era have not necessarily even aimed to increase welfare (Kartasamita 2008). Decentralisation has also meant decentralisation of corrupt practices and vested interests of individual leaders or groups. Instead of fully reformed democratisation of Indonesian regions the post-New Order decentralisation has led into what Gerry van Klinken (2009) has called "patronage democracy" borrowing the term from Kanchan Chandra's study on post-independence Indian politics. Electoral democratic structures exist parallel to, and are interlinked with, traditional and new patronage networks that involve local elites, civil servants and businesspeople as well as leaders of religious and social organisations. In order to win local (district) elections,

2 Two decentralisation laws were introduced: law no. 22/1999 on regional government, which was replaced by the law no. 32/2004; and law no. 25/1999 on the fiscal balance between the central government and the regions. The laws first became effective in 2001.

3 Indonesian Department of Home Affairs has evaluated the implementation of autonomy in the districts in 2007 and 2010. In 2010 it assessed that the provinces of North Sulawesi, South Sulawesi and Central Java were performing best in terms of implementing regional autonomy. Aceh held the 30th position of 33 provinces. Aceh's district that scored highest was Aceh Barat Daya that reached position 101 amongst the 450 districts. Banda Aceh held the 62nd position amongst Indonesian towns. The decision of the Minister for Home Affairs no 120-276/2011 http://www.ditjen-otda.depdagri.go.id/otdaiii/hasil_ekppd_2010.pdf.

a candidate must be well connected within such networks that guarantee the necessary financial and social support.

It is true that so-called participatory planning has been introduced around the country (Musrembang) but this tends to be dominated by a myriad of established groups at all levels and the important decisions are still taken by the top-level executives and politicians. It is also true that the World Bank in cooperation with the government has introduced community development programs on the sub-district (kecamatan development program; KDP) levels around the country, but the model is criticised for bypassing the task of improving and democratizing public government in favour of fostering neoliberal oriented project style governance (Sindre, 2011). So generally speaking, it still seems that weaker groups among the wider parts of Indonesian population are not represented on the basis of their own interests and priorities. The same applies to the production-oriented classes and groups among farmers, labourers, entrepreneurs and the professional middle classes that have in other contexts been crucial in fostering of inclusive growth. The interests of women also remain marginalised. (Priyono, Samadhi & Törnquist, with Birks, 2007; Samadhi & Warouw, 2008, 2009; Mietzner, 2012.)

The transitional nature of post-conflict society in Aceh where power relations and centre-region as well as province-district relations are under negotiation, makes an analysis of democracy and democratic participation particularly challenging. On the one hand, many features of post-New Order patronage democracy in other Indonesian regions are clearly present in Aceh. On the other hand, post-conflict politics based on the Helsinki peace agreement and the following LoGA, through which members of the former insurgency movement are to be reintegrated into political and economic structures that themselves are in the making, form particular conditions that do not exist in other parts of Indonesia. In order to fully grasp the nature and aims of the participatory research project that will be discussed in the second part of this report it is necessary to describe in some detail Aceh's post-conflict conditions.

ACEH'S CONFLICTS AND ITS SPECIAL STATUS

Aceh has somehow been an exception to the rule in the region ever since the Dutch efforts to colonise the northernmost tip of Sumatra in the late 19th century. Several decades of bloody warfare between the Dutch forces and the Acehnese scarred and divided Acehnese society and have influenced its history thereafter. Since Indonesia's independence in 1945 Aceh has gone through two other conflicts, an Islamic rebellion in the 1950s and the Free Aceh Movement's (GAM) struggle for Aceh's independence in 1974-2005. A number of studies have analysed the most recent conflict in Aceh, most of which agree that amongst its causes were; the exploitation of Aceh's natural resources – particularly the natural gas reserves along the north coast – by outsiders while local population grew impoverished; the increasingly centralised rule of Indonesia under Suharto's regime; and excessive force used by the Indonesian armed forces to suppress the initially small rebellion led by Hasan di Tiro (Reid, 2004; Aspinall, 2004).

Until the late 1990s GAM's rebellion concentrated in the north and northeast coastal areas of Aceh, while the rest of the province remained relatively peaceful. A dramatic change took place in 1998 when after the change of regime in Indonesia, demands to find solutions to Indonesia's conflicts in Aceh, Papua and East Timor became vocal. Witnessing the emergence of independent Timor Leste (East Timor), Acehnese also started to demand a referendum over their region's status. In 1999 a mass demonstration was organised by a civil society organisation (SIRA) in the capital Banda Aceh, to voice these demands. But Indonesian Government's reaction to the referendum was negative; instead it offered Aceh special autonomy laws (Law no. 44/1999 and no. 18/2001). The implementation of these special autonomy laws never really took off in Aceh.⁴ Instead, military operations continued. GAM took advantage of the feelings of disappointment and desperation amongst Acehnese population and recruited

⁴ Ever since the Islamic Darul Islam-rebellion in the 1950s Indonesian Government has tried to settle the "Aceh problem" through special autonomy laws. In 1959 it was decided that Aceh should have autonomy over matters related to religion, education and adat (customary law) (Morris, 1983)

Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Indonesia and Free Aceh Movement:

- A new Law on the Governance of Aceh to be promulgated that is based on principle that Aceh will exercise authority within all sectors of public affairs, except for the field of foreign affairs, external defence, national security, monetary and fiscal matters, and justice and freedom of religion.
- Political participation will be guaranteed, including facilitation of establishment of Aceh-based political parties
- Economy: Aceh will retain 70% of revenues from all current and future hydrocarbon deposits and other natural resources
- Rule of Law: the legislature of Aceh will draft a legal code of Aceh on the basis of universal principles of human rights
- Human Rights: establishment of Human Rights Court and Commission for Truth and Reconciliation for Aceh
- Amnesty and reintegration measures targeted to former combatants, pardoned political prisoners and all conflict-affected civilians
- Security measures: withdrawal of Indonesian non-organic military and police forces from Aceh; disarmament of GAM
- Establishment of Aceh Monitoring Mission

Table 2

Main points of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement GAM.

thousands of new members. After 1998 the conflict spread to other areas of Aceh. For example South Aceh, the focus of this research project, became a conflict zone only after 1998. Violence intensified particularly after May 2003 when martial law was again enforced in Aceh, and the province's contacts with the outside world were practically cut off. Due to this the regional autonomy laws that became effective in other parts of Indonesia had little effect on Aceh.

While it is not possible to provide exact numbers of GAM's strength, most observers estimate that the insurgency group had 15,000 - 20,000 fighters and supporters at the time of the end of conflict in 2005. Thirty years of conflict cost the lives of at least 15,000 people. A World Bank (2010) survey estimated that the total economic damage caused by the Aceh's conflict would be around USD\$10.7 billion. This includes around 30,000 houses that were destroyed in the conflict, as well as numerous public buildings (schools and government offices) and private enterprises. Typically to the so-called new wars, the conflict severely affected the lives of civilian population as the military operations targeted fighters and the civilian population alike, human rights abuses were widespread and farming and other everyday economic activities became in many places impossible due to security threats. A study by the International Organisation for Migration (2007) and Harvard University has shown that conflict-related traumatisation is high in Aceh's communities. One of the districts that

showed particularly high level of traumatisation is South Aceh.⁵

Aceh's long conflict ended in August 2005 with the signing of Helsinki MoU. The main points of the Helsinki MoU are outlined in table 2. The Helsinki MoU covered a wide range of issues but it did not stipulate in detail how the peace agreement should be implemented. The features of Aceh's special status that had been agreed upon in principle in Helsinki were given legal force through the Law on the Governing of Aceh (LoGA) in mid-2006. To implement the stipulations of LoGA, five new Government Regulations and three Presidential Regulations were needed; determining political issues (the local political parties in Aceh); the division of authorities between the central government and Aceh government; as well as economic matters (oil and gas revenues). Since 2006 there has been a continuing negotiation process between Aceh and Jakarta government representatives to prepare the required regulations and thus determine what Aceh's special status means in practice. At the time of writing some regulations were still under negotiation⁶

5 The respondents to the IOM survey suffered from depression (33%), anxiety (48%) and post-traumatic stress disorder (19%).

6 For the negotiation processes see Bahrul Ulum Consultation process on Government Regulations and Presidential Regulations, Mandated by the Law on the Governance of Aceh, 2011, http://www.acehpeaceprocess.net/images/stories/publications/aceh_report4.pdf.

In the context of such complex matters as local governance both the LoGA and national regional autonomy laws are followed so it often remains unclear to what extent Aceh can diverge from other provinces. At the same time Aceh's provincial government and district governments sometimes have differing ideas on what has actually been agreed in the regulations. This is the case, for example, in the dispute over the management of Special Autonomy Funds, which currently form over half of Aceh's provincial budget (APBA). Some 60 per cent of these funds must be allocated to development programs of districts. Although this is the case in practice the funds are not transferred to the districts but remain with the province that allocates the funds to the districts only when they implement development projects that have been agreed with the provincial government. District governments in Aceh often feel that the provincial level government does not allocate sufficient funds for their development programs. During the research South Aceh's government representatives also expressed such concerns. Aceh Districts' Coordination Forum (Forum KKA) has repeatedly requested that the funds should be transferred to the districts and the district governments should have full authority to manage them.⁷

Aceh's political structures are also in transition. The Helsinki MoU envisions Aceh's democratic framework as a multiparty democracy, in which both national and local political parties are representing the interests of their constituencies in provincial parliament (DPRA) and district councils (DPRK). The parties are entitled to put forward candidates in Gubernatorial and Head of Administrative District (Bupati) elections and independent candidates are also allowed to run for these positions.⁸ To allow local political par-

ties to be established was the most difficult issue at the table in the peace talks in Helsinki, as the representatives of the Government of Indonesia were initially strongly against it. As an alternative there was an offer that Jakarta would assist GAM to establish a national political party, which was rejected by GAM. GAM representatives insisted instead that it was in their interests to allow anybody in Aceh to establish a political party rather than aim for a power-sharing arrangement with national political parties.

The inclusive democratic framework that was consequently drafted in Helsinki was upheld by the winning coalition in the 2006 elections when the Governor of Aceh and most Bupatis were elected. It turned out that in the Gubernatorial election national political party candidates⁹ had little chances against the independent candidates. Even in the districts that were perceived as stern supporters of national political parties and with anti-GAM the majority voted for the GAM-affiliated Irwandi Yusuf and his Vice Governor candidate, civil society activist Muhammad Nazar.¹⁰ Yusuf and Nazar won in all but six of Aceh's then 21 districts.

Having executive leaders at the provincial level with strong links to GAM and the civil society turned out, at least initially, to be beneficial for peace and reconstruction in Aceh, as they had the skills and courage that were needed to negotiate with both the central government and GAM's military commanders. Similar combination was victorious also in many districts: A GAM-affiliated Bupati with most commonly a SIRA-linked Vice Bupati led ten out of current 23 districts, while other districts were led by a pair representing most commonly a coalition of two or more national political parties. However, at the district level (as well as province level) it turned out in practice after some time that the GAM-SIRA cooperation was less than smooth and led into

7 See for example Islahuddin: Some Preliminary Notes on Aceh Special Autonomy Funds and Oil and Gas Earning Funds. <http://www.acehpeaceprocess.net/images/stories/publications/islahuddin.pdf>

8 MoU section 1.2. on Political participation outlines these principles. LoGA implemented the MoU by enabling the establishment of local political parties in Aceh. LoGA limited the participation of independent candidates to the first Gubernatorial/Bupati elections that were held in 2006, but in December 2010 the Indonesian Constitutional Court revoked the LoGA article in question (Art. 256), thus opening the opportunity for independent candidates in all future elections.

9 Local political parties were only established after the 2006 election.

10 Muhammad Nazar was the leader of SIRA, or Information Centre for Aceh Referendum that had been formed in 1999 to channel the popular demands to organise a referendum that would allow Acehnese to vote whether they want to be part of Indonesia or become independent. Later SIRA has become a political party with same acronym, but now referring to Suara Independen Rakyat Aceh, or Aceh People's Independent Voice.

internal power struggles in the Executive and not very efficient governance. Yet it seems that it was possible to further develop democratic representation and participation and thus somewhat increase social and economic welfare in Aceh. In the early post-conflict years there was openness that allowed new groups to approach the government and cooperate with them.

The 2009 provincial parliament and district council elections, however, took Aceh in a direction that suggests that the power-sharing model that was turned down by GAM in the Helsinki peace talks has in fact become political reality in Aceh. Towards the 2009 election local political parties had been established and six of them competed in the elections. The election results indicated that Aceh clearly moved away from the multi-party inclusive democracy that had been intended in the peace agreement, and towards de facto power-sharing between Partai Aceh (PA) that now represented the dominant conservative sections of GAM and national political parties, particularly Partai Demokrat (PD).¹¹ In the provincial parliament (DPRA), PA won 33 out of 69 seats, which was far more than any of the following parties (PD has ten seats, Golkar eight, PAN five, PKS four, and PPP three seats). All six other parties in the DPRA only got one seat each; and only one of them was a local (Islamic) party.¹²

In the district councils the post-2009 election situation varies, but the dominance of PA is clear particularly in the northeastern part of Aceh. In seven districts PA won over fifty percent of the votes and thus came to rule the district councils singlehandedly until 2014. The reformist sections of GAM and the civil society oriented activists that were so crucial in 2006 election lost out in 2009 district council elections. In ten other districts PA's portion of representative seats is between 20-40 per cent, while other parties have at least the possibility of effective opposition politics through coalitions. South Aceh district, which is the focus of the research project discussed in this report, belongs to this category. In the remaining six districts there are no leading political parties

as no party holds more than a few seats. In these districts voters have clearly elected individuals despite their political party affiliation.

After 2009 elections Aceh's provincial governance became highly influenced by the PA and its internal frictions. Even though the PA does not form a single majority in the DPRA, in practice it dominates every parliamentary committee and decision-making. Until the 2011 Gubernatorial election the working relationship between Aceh's Executive and Legislative was blocked by GAM's internal struggles, as Governor Yusuf was perceived as a rival to PA leaders. At least partly due to these internal rivalries in 2011 the DPRA managed to pass only one by-law (Qanun), which was the budget. The Qanun was passed finally in late April, only after the central government had threatened to cut the general allocation funds to Aceh. Similar problems were repeated in the districts. The openness that prevailed in the 2006-2008 period has vanished and exclusive politics and economy that is dominated by PA/KPA and business people close to them, has taken over.

In early 2012 the second post-conflict Gubernatorial and District Head elections were organised. The election period was characterised by intimidation and violence.¹³ At the provincial level Yusuf lost to PA-supported candidate Zaini Abdullah whose Vice Governor candidate was GAM's former highest military commander and the leader of the Aceh Transitional Committee (KPA) Muzakkir Manaf. This meant that the reformist GAM representatives and persons with civil society background were ousted from provincial government and replaced by conservative GAM-affiliated people. District Head election was organised in 2012 in twenty districts, and PA won in ten of them while in others the winning candidates represented coalitions of several national and local parties. In South Aceh district the election was held in early 2013, which will be discussed more in detail below. Two districts will hold district Head elections only in 2014.

The reasons why Aceh has moved further away from an inclusive democratic model have been assessed by a number of scholars. After the 2006

11 This power-sharing was made even clearer in the Presidential Elections where PA supported the PD candidate, the incumbent President Yudhoyono.

12 For the detailed elections results and further analyses see Uning & Törnquist (2011)

13 See for example the final report of ANFREL, and international organisation that observed Aceh's elections in 2012. <http://anfrel.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Aceh-Mission-Findings-report.pdf>

election there were high expectations for a more accountable and less collusive government. Even though the reforms have fallen short of high expectations many political agents interviewed by the Aceh Participatory Research Team in late 2008 agreed that serious efforts had been made to improve governance and to get rid of old corrupt practices. But corrupt practices nevertheless continued, and most political actors interviewed perceived them an acceptable part of a “transitional period”. Handing over projects to former GAM commanders was seen as a necessary measure to sustain peace. Clean, corruption-free governance was seen as something to be happening in the future, but very few could specify how long Aceh should remain in the process of transition (Uning & Törnquist, 2011). The 2009 political turn that sidelined previously dominant parties and provided key positions in the provincial parliament and district councils to PA has strengthened the tendency of “transitional politics and economy”. Thereafter democracy has been further undermined, which make the conclusions from this research even more important but possibly also more difficult to implement.

In summary the problems of democracy in Aceh are firstly the deterioration of representation through the electoral system that in the immediate post-conflict years was better in Aceh than elsewhere in Indonesia at large (thanks to the presence of local parties); and secondly, governance in between the elections in terms of decision-making, developing policies and planning and the participation in these practices remains quite undemocratic. In this context political parties, government officials and old and new powerful actors and power structures, play roles and interact with business actors. Quite beyond the principles of democratic representation and participation, lobbying and networking – methods commonly used also by liberal civil society groups and student organisations in Indonesia and globally – are the main methods for promoting one’s own interests. Decisions are made and priorities set in private meetings rather than through formal meetings where all interest groups would be present and have equal chances to present their interests. There seems to be a lack of interest in establishing and strengthening any interest-based popular organisations that would

have democratic access to the political and executive positions in the province. “Transition” is presented as acceptable reason for upholding old corrupt practices (see Aspinall, 2009; Törnquist et al, 2009). Perhaps most serious is that this hampers the chances of developing inclusive social and economic development.

SOUTH ACEH PROJECT

In late 2009 it started to appear that many vital democratic actors of change in Aceh were becoming increasingly excluded from public governance processes. Based on this general conclusion Olle Törnquist, Fajran Zain and Leena Avonius designed a participatory research project in late 2009. The aim was to explore how research could be used to assist enhancing democratisation from below, through developing a strategy that would be inspired by experiences in other world regions. The initiators aimed to use applied research to facilitate transformative politics towards making public governance and development in Aceh more inclusive. The plan was to examine where people at present tried to handle their problems, to what actors and institutions they turned to with their grievances and how they themselves came together when trying to make a difference. Through this it was perceived to be possible to discuss how popular demands from below could be better organised to get people’s own voices heard. How would it be possible to support efforts at democratic inclusion of broad interest based organisations in public governance to promote social and economic development in accordance with people’s own needs? Furthermore, it was also planned that the project would try out a model for how better knowledge of the local problems and options of democratisation in an Indonesian district could make international municipality cooperation meaningful. What should be focused on and what actors of change could play a major role?

To achieve the goal it was considered better to focus on one of Aceh’s 23 districts rather than the whole province. In this way, the questions discussed would remain more concrete and tangible. The selected district was perceived to be a pilot case, where the problems and options could

be specified and from which other districts could later learn. The initiators looked for a district that had challenges typical to Aceh. Some additional conditions were included. First, the selected district was to be as much as possible untouched by the post-tsunami reconstruction, as in the main tsunami-affected area conditions had been quite unusual due to massive international aid efforts since late 2004. Second, the district's 2009 parliamentary election results should represent the inclusive vision of Aceh politics that had been envisioned in the peace agreement. Thus, a district with a multiparty district council was preferable, limiting the selection to those ten districts that had neither absolute majority of a party nor scattered representation of individual politicians. And third, as most research at that time had focused on areas in the vicinity of the provincial capital Banda Aceh the initiators also wanted to focus on a district that would have been less studied.

South Aceh district fulfilled the above criteria.¹⁴ Prior to final decision it was, however, also considered necessary to ensure that there was sufficient will of local government as well as non-government actors to contribute and make use of the results. A visit to South Aceh, the district that the team thought had most potential, was deemed necessary for discussions with local government and non-government stakeholders in order to assess whether there was local interest towards this kind of endeavor. The visit convinced the initiators that the research project was possible and a proposal was prepared for the ICLD with a recommended research focus in South Aceh district.

The project team conducted participatory research on democratic processes in South Aceh district in 2010-2011. Four themes were taken under scrutiny: physical planning, production economy, social security and access to justice.¹⁵ The themes were selected and further developed in the beginning of the project at a workshop that brought together representatives of South Aceh district government and district council,

academics and non-governmental actors coming from South Aceh district, as well as the representatives of ICLD and the two implementing organisations; the Aceh Institute and ICAIOS. During a two day workshop South Aceh's situation and its numerous problems and challenges were discussed. There was a consensus that the four themes suggested in the initial plan would cover most areas that the workshop participants perceived problematic. After the workshop the implementing organisations created a more detailed project plan and recruited four researchers and a number of local research assistants. Furthermore, two Consultative Groups were formed to ensure the maximum impact of the research project by involving government and non-government stakeholders throughout the process. The research team had regular meetings with the consultative groups to discuss the issues under scrutiny. One Consultative Group functioned at the provincial level and included academics and civil society representatives with South Aceh background and commitment to develop their home district. The second Consultative Group was formed in South Aceh, consisting of government officials, politicians and civil society representatives. The second consultative group was clearly less successful, possibly because of wider geographic distance (as researchers were working in Banda Aceh and not based in South Aceh).

The aim of the research project was to identify and analyze the spaces for democratic interest-based participation and suggest ways to foster appropriate institutions as well as the capacity amongst key actors to promote and use the institutions. The research focused on existing practices, formal as well as informal institutions, and highlighted challenges and opportunities for participatory democratic practices in Aceh. It identified key problems, but also discussed the possibilities to learn from other experiences. The leading idea of the research was that if one could specify the problems and options and engage actors of change in discussing and analyzing them, it would be possible to draw academically credible recommendations from the research on how to best make use of presently available spaces for democratic improvements in South Aceh.

Other contexts where there have been similar problems and inspiring attempts to overcome

14 Other possible districts would have been in the southeastern part of Aceh, but their closeness to Medan, one of Indonesia's biggest cities, was seen as a disadvantage. Another good candidates would have been West Aceh and Nagan Raya, but both were tsunami aid areas.

15 Initially a separate theme of education was to be included, but it was decided that education and health issues would be covered under 'social security' theme.

them were used as sources for potential lessons to be learned. As mentioned in the introduction, possible comparative examples included the most comprehensive historical cases of democracy-led combinations of welfare and growth in Scandinavia, but also more recent attempts to move in similar directions in for instance Brazil, India and the Philippines, as well as local cases in other parts of Indonesia. Törnquist together with Masters student Ida Hauger Ratikainen from Oslo University were briefing the research team on these experiences.

The leading research question was “where do people go when they have a problem that they deem to be of common (and not just private) concern?” This question can only be asked within the framework of some major sectors – the research project opted for access to justice, education, physical planning and production, as these were the areas that representatives of South Aceh government and non-governmental actors had indicated to be problematic but also essential for increasing welfare and participation. It soon became obvious that since there are hardly any previous studies and very little reliable data available on South Aceh, it was essential at first to establish an overall idea of these sectors, and their major problems. Only after that would it be possible to identify the problems and challenges of people’s participation, and to identify possible solutions.

Four research teams, each focusing on one of the selected themes, conducted field research from June to November 2010. Each researcher was assisted by a number of research assistants with local knowledge. In the beginning of field research the team presented their research plans and initial hypotheses to South Aceh government representatives, consultative groups and to non-governmental stakeholders in Tapaktuan (the capital of South Aceh district). All researchers collected data through interviews, focus group discussions and observation. One researcher conducted a survey with structured interview format amongst village chiefs. Secondary research material was collected in forms of government documents, statistics, media coverage etc. Researchers prepared reports, which were revised several times based on comments and discussions with the Team Leader as well as the fellow researchers in coordination meetings of the research group.

The drafts were also presented to consultative groups and to South Aceh stakeholders.

In September 2010 the project team came together to discuss the status of individual research projects and researchers presented the ongoing work to the stakeholders in South Aceh as well as to the consultative groups. A major conclusion of this meeting was that the researchers had mapped quite well the situation and major problems but they had not yet succeeded in analyzing the problems or preparing recommendations. Theoretical frameworks and comparative examples from elsewhere were discussed in an internal research team meeting in order to push the research work towards this direction. The researchers then conducted further field research, revised and completed their research reports towards the end of 2010. In the sections below the main results will be summarised, together with recommendations that were generated from the team’s discussions of the results. Before discussing the results and recommendations a brief description of South Aceh district is given.

SOUTH ACEH’S CURRENT SITUATION

The district of South Aceh (see the lower part of Aceh province map below) is one of the 23 administrative districts in Aceh. It is located on Sumatra’s western coast in Indonesia. South Aceh district’s land area is 400,510 hectares and it has 174 kilometers of coastline. The district is divided into 18 sub-districts, which in turn consist of altogether 248 villages. The administrative centre is Tapaktuan. South Aceh has a population of around 212,000 people. There are around fifty thousand households with an average size of four persons per household. The population consists of three ethnic groups: around 40 per cent are Acehnese, 35 per cent Jamee, and 25 per cent of Kluet.¹⁶

16 Acehnese are the ethnic majority of Aceh province. In South Aceh they mostly inhabit the district capital Tapaktuan and the sub-districts north of it. Jamee is an ethnic group that is linguistically closely related to West Sumatran Minangkabau. Jamee are mostly inhabiting the Labuhanhaji area in the north part of South Aceh and other coastal areas. The third ethnic group Kluet inhabits four sub-districts in the central part of South Aceh. Kluet has its own language that is further divided in at least three dialects.

economic growth. At the time of research government officials were trying to cut down such routine costs to be able to allocate more public funds to government programs.

The main sources of livelihood in South Aceh are agriculture and fishing. Over two thirds of the population (67.8 per cent or almost thirty-five thousand households) earns a living from farming food crops or cash crops. The main food crop is rice and the main cash crops are nutmeg and palm oil. Patchouli oil is also being produced in South Aceh. There are some 8,000 fisherman households in 14 South Aceh's sub-districts. All major production areas in South Aceh still have great growth potential. There is plenty of idle farmland, which is left uncultivated either due to security threats during conflict years or due to lack of proper irrigation system. Under-developed technology keeps the production of fisheries far below the Maximum Sustainable Yield (of less than twelve thousand tons, which is some 40 per cent of MSY).¹⁹

Some 70 per cent of South Aceh's land area falls under categorisation of various types of conservation areas. Eighty thousand hectares belong to the Gunung Leuser National Park.²⁰ In the long run the wide conservation area could be seen as a challenge for increasing agricultural production. Yet, at the same time the National Park and conservation areas could provide additional sources of livelihood if, for example, ecological tourism was developed. The unique nature also attracts many researchers of flora and fauna. The conservation area can also support the district's economy thorough carbon trade.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research conducted in this project brought up numerous and complex problems and challenges in South Aceh's development in the four

¹⁹ Data from the Department of Fisheries in South Aceh, 2009.

²⁰ Gunung Leuser Ecosystem is one of the world's largest rainforest areas. Its protection effort have been supported by many international agencies, including the EU.

examined fields.²¹ This research report does not allow a detailed discussion on the findings. Instead, the major issues will be summarised below; they can be categorised through such keywords as stagnating production, poor democratic governance, limited capacity of citizens to participate, and lack of vision amongst the district leadership.

STAGNATING PRODUCTION

South Aceh's economy is currently experiencing stagnation in production. Stagnation can be detected in idle fields, non-increasing production of rice, decreasing production of nutmeg²² and only a very slow increase in the production of fisheries. The market in South Aceh is sluggish with low purchasing power of both consumers and the government. In the post-conflict period a number of shop-houses have been built in South Aceh, but the research group observed many closed-down shops or business premises that had never even opened their doors for business in South Aceh's commercial centres of Tapaktuan and Kuta Fajar. The unemployment rate in South Aceh is 9.83 per cent, which is higher than the neighboring districts Aceh Singkil (7.81 per cent) or Aceh Barat Daya (7.21 per cent).²³

A number of reasons can be given for the stagnation. First, the impact of conflict on production is apparent as it left many fields and orchards uncultivated for years all over Aceh. According to the Multi-Stakeholder Review on Aceh's conflict costs and assistance the conflict damage to the rice fields was particularly high in the districts of South Aceh and Bener Meriah (World Bank, 2010). In addition to conflict damage South Aceh's nutmeg production has, since the late 1990s, been seriously affected by a fungus disease that kills nutmeg trees. In such a situation local

²¹ A full research report Pemetaan Ruang Demokrasi di Aceh Selatan was handed over to South Aceh government representatives as well as the Aceh Governor in early 2011. The results will be published in a book in 2013.

²² According to the Indonesian Bureau of Statistics (BPS) in 2009 only 4,651 ha of South Aceh's 13,441 ha of nutmeg plantation land was cultivated. In 2008 the BPS calculated that 4,640 ha out of 24,146 of South Aceh's irrigated rice fields were used for production. Fadhli Ali's research report.

²³ Balai Pusat Statistik: 'Hasil Sakernas, Indikator terpilih Ekonomi Aceh sampai bulan Agustus 2010.'

farmers would clearly need outside assistance to take the idle farming land back to cultivation. This leads to the second factor upholding the stagnation, already mentioned above, which is the limited public budget funds available to support the development of production. In South Aceh, like in many other Indonesian districts, no less than 70 per cent of the district budget is spent on the salaries of civil servants and routine operational costs of the state bureaucracy. As most funds are spent on maintaining the government bureaucracy, very little is available for public expenditure and investments that are often essential in economically difficult times to stimulate the local economy and counter the effects of recession. Thus the district government does not have funds available for projects proposed by residents even if they would agree in principle that they are important.

Third, the lack of funds allocated to programs as well as poorly designed, implemented and coordinated interventions in the key economic sectors, are hindering production development and economic growth. For example, infrastructure in the fields of agriculture and fisheries is insufficient. Irrigation systems have been built in many sub-districts, but only parts of them are fully functioning.²⁴ If the infrastructure were made fully functional it would remarkably increase the productive area of rice fields in South Aceh district. Another example of failed intervention can be found in the nutmeg production that has been seriously affected by the fungus disease over recent years. The lack of coordination has made efforts to solve the problem ineffective. To rid South Aceh of the nutmeg disease some experts have suggested that all nutmeg trees should be cut down at the same time, and new uninfected trees replanted. Currently the farmers mostly try to fight the pest by themselves, for example in 2011 the then Bupati of South Aceh who has a nutmeg plantation of several hundred trees described to the research team in detail a method he himself had developed to treat his own plantation with salt. But if the trees in the neighbouring plantations are not also treated, the fungus will re-contaminate his treated trees quite quickly.

To develop the fisheries – another important

economic sector in the district – would also require more efficiently targeted government support. Currently there are only limited opportunities to raise capital available for the fishermen, as private capital-holders do not consider investment climate in South Aceh attractive. A major problem for local fishermen and traders seems to be the dependency on merchants in faraway Medan, the capital of neighbouring North Sumatra province, both with regard to marketing of fish and the provision of ice; also there is no local canning industry. In fact, many fishermen even appear to struggle to keep their current boats and fishing equipment functional. For example, the research team talked with fishermen who were repairing their traditional wooden fishing boats. The men told that due to logging moratorium they had difficulties finding wood to repair the boats.²⁵ They had to use wood from demolished buildings, or sometimes they purchased illegally cut wood that had been confiscated by the police. The government assisted in providing new engines to fishing boats on request, but the engines were of poor quality and usually broke down within a few years. Those with sufficient resources preferred buying second hand engines of better quality from far away ports like Singapore. Due to poor equipment the South Aceh fishermen were not able to go long distances and they complained that fishermen with modern fleet and equipment from the neighbouring province North Sumatra, and allegedly also from as far as Thailand and the Philippines, entered South Aceh's waters.

In short, there is a lack of local control of the development of fishing and industry based on fishing; and there does not seem to be any significant organisations among fishermen, the owners of the fishing boats and petty and large scale local traders that are capable of engaging in the development of the fishing sector. Customary (*adat*) organisations do not make up for this. In South Aceh, like elsewhere in Aceh, there is a custom-

25 Aceh government had announced logging moratorium in 2007 in order to preserve the remaining rain forests and the unique Sumatran wildlife. Due to the civil conflict that prevented logging Aceh is one of the few regions in Indonesia that still have natural forests. In early 2013 the new Aceh Governor Zaini Abdullah has indicated that he plans to reopen Aceh's forests for logging.

24 Research report by Fadhli Ali.

ary fishermen's institution of *Panglima Laot* (Sea Commander). While during the Suharto regime such *adat* institutions were marginalised in the post-Suharto reform era, they have been revitalised in many parts of Indonesia. Following this tendency, the Law on the Governance of Aceh also recognised Aceh's *adat* institutions including *Panglima Laot* as "tools for people's participation in Aceh's governance" *Panglima Laot* is one of the *adat* institutions that has been praised by many, not least due to its potential role in responding to natural catastrophes such as tropical storms and tsunamis. Based on this information the research team also assumed that *Panglima Laot* in South Aceh might provide a good tool for advancing fishermen's needs and aspirations to the district government. However, when fishermen were asked about *Panglima Laot* they stated that in South Aceh the *adat* institution only becomes active if a fisherman dies at sea. In such occasion the *Panglima Laot* will make arrangements for the funeral and assist the family of the deceased. However with their other concerns and needs, the fishermen said, they would never turn to *Panglima Laot* for assistance or advice. Neither could they name any other institution to which they could approach to discuss matters related to their industry.

POOR DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

There is now increasing awareness that electoral reforms and democratic elections are necessary but insufficient to bring about fundamental transformations in post-conflict areas (Reilly, 2002). Aceh, as shown in the introductory sections, is a good case in point. Elections must be accompanied by efforts to strengthen the capacity of the government departments and officials to run the government, prepare rational budgets and ensure that public expenditures are healthy and supportive of local economy and welfare. This will not come about without good representation and participation of the crucial actors involved in production, trade and services on the side of capital/employers as well as labourers and self-employed. In post-conflict Aceh most good governance-programs have so far focused on the provincial level while few efforts have been made

to improve the governance at the district/municipality level.²⁶

Poor governance is visible in many ways in South Aceh government. A factor is the low capacity of civil servants. It is not always a question of poor skills as such, but poor allocation of human resources. In South Aceh, like elsewhere in Aceh, civil servants are regularly rotated from one department to another without paying attention to what a person's educational background, personal skills and interests are. Meritocracy rarely plays a role in recruitment practices. Due to this, government departments lack staff members that have expertise in the field they are working in. For example, at the time of the research the fisheries department in South Aceh only had one staff member with a degree in fisheries. Instead of expertise and merits civil servants appear to be recruited due to their family or other connections. This is apparent for example in the education and health sector; in primary schools there is a surplus of teachers but many of them are not qualified teachers even though the Indonesian law on education demands this; and the respondents working at the district hospital complained that they are pushed to hire staff who have no medical training but are relatives of "important community members."²⁷

Another problem that hinders the government to work efficiently, for example in advancing economic production, is lack of coordination amongst government departments. Government departments tend to plan and implement programs sectorally without efforts to coordinate with other departments. This may lead into a situation where a program supported by one government department will conflict with programs by other departments. For example, the agricultural sector is under two separate government departments; the Department for Agriculture that takes care of fields and irrigation; and the Department of Plantations and Gardens. In order to develop the agricultural sector the two departments should closely cooperate, but according to information from people working at these depart-

26 In 2011-2012 GIZ implemented an EU-funded program Aceh District Response Facility that aimed to improve the governance in eleven of Aceh's twenty-three districts. The program also included South Aceh district.

27 Research reports of Fadhli Ali and Teuku Kemal Fasya.

ments in South Aceh, in fact they never hold any kind of coordination meetings.

Lack of transparency in governance is another fundamental problem that prevents people's participation in decision-making in South Aceh. While development planning processes in Aceh like elsewhere in Indonesia are in principle transparent and participatory, in practice citizens find it extremely difficult to access information on decisions made by the government on budget allocation and on decision-making processes that lead into accepting some proposals and rejecting others. Lack of transparency and failure to include people with local knowledge and planning of development projects can cause wasted budget funds. An example of such a case is a project that was to build an intake of an irrigation system in 2008 to provide irrigation water for seven villages in Kluet Timur sub-district in South Aceh. According to information received by the research team, local population as well as traditional irrigation expert *Keujruen Blang* were excluded from the project planning. A consequence of this was that the lack of understanding of the local river environment led to wrong decision regarding the location of the intake. Three billion Rupiah were spent to build an intake that was destroyed by a strong current in the middle of construction work. Even though the intake was finally completed, due to technical mistakes made in the construction the irrigation system has never functioned properly. This failed project has left over 800 hectares of farming land without irrigation. Eventually in 2011 another 4.8 billion Rupiah project was given by the Aceh Water Department to a commercial company to reconstruct the intake, but even this project ran into problems as the company did not start any work in the area during the 2011 budget year, which led to suspicions of possible corrupt practices in tendering the project ("Irigasi Tak Terfungsi," 2012; "Bupati Kecewa", 2012).

A democratically functioning government system has mechanisms that allow citizens to bring up their needs and aspirations and participate in decision-making. The Indonesia Development Planning Consultation Forum, *Musrenbang*, was created in 2004 to facilitate people's participation

at all levels (from national to village level).²⁸ The *Musrenbang* system is also used in Aceh where annual public planning meetings are organised in villages as well as at sub-district, district and provincial levels. However, a survey conducted by the South Aceh research team examining physical planning in South Aceh concluded that while at the village and sub-district level citizens are able to put forward their proposals via *Musrenbang* mechanism and make democratic decisions on which projects should be prioritised, it often happens that at the district level *Musrenbang* meeting their prioritised proposals "disappear". Instead, projects that are accepted for implementation by the district government are often introduced by "insiders", that is, persons or enterprises that are well connected with high officials in the government. In post-conflict South Aceh the "insiders" were often said to be connected with the Transitional Committee of Aceh (KPA), which some observers characterise as "the economic wing" of Partai Aceh.²⁹ As a result the projects that are put forward by villagers themselves and based on participatory decision-making at the village level and the actual needs of the village are not implemented while projects that are based on interests of some individuals receive government funding.³⁰

LIMITED CAPACITY OF CITIZENS TO PARTICIPATE

The government alone is not to be blamed for South Aceh's situation. The problems the district is confronting are complex and should be addressed from several perspectives. It is clear that there is democratic space for citizens' groups and organisations to move and manoeuvre in South Aceh. There are no restrictions to people's freedom to assemble and express their opinions. The authorities do not suppress demonstrations and journalists can work freely. The space may be

28 For a short description of Musrenbang see http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADQ129.pdf

29 In 2008-2013 such persons would be close to the GAM-affiliated Bupati. The Head of the Chamber of Commerce suggested in one of the research seminars that the 'traditional businessmen' of South Aceh had been sidelined by the KPA. It remains to be seen how the 2013 election result will affect such connections.

30 Saiful Mahdi's research report.

limited by poor access to information and lack of financial means, but it is there. There are nevertheless factors that delimit people's participation in decision-making processes in South Aceh. A problem related to participation at the district level, or in the villages, is that there are no regulations in South Aceh that would facilitate people's participation in decision-making. While higher-level regulations, national and provincial, enable participation in principle, lower-level regulations would be needed to facilitate participation in practice.³¹

It appears that while the government does not encourage people's participation in South Aceh it is not prevented either. Why is it, then, that the citizens, neither as individuals nor as groups, do not maximally use the available space? A possible explanation is suggested by Saiful Mahdi in his research report on spatial planning; according to him many people, particularly in the villages in South Aceh, lack the necessary skills to be able to initiate projects and lobby them successfully in the public planning system *Musrenbang*. This notion invites one to question whether the *Musrenbang* is not too project-oriented, opening up opportunities for those in the society that possess the necessary skills and networks to prosper in a competition-oriented system in which the best project proposal wins.

The World Bank-initiated participatory development program PNPM (*Program Nasional Pemberdayaan Masyarakat*) has partly addressed the problems of *Musrenbang*. It provides funding directly to sub-districts, thus by-passing the problematic higher levels at which project proposals often become corrupted. In Aceh not only national budget funds but also Aceh-specific village development funds (BKPG, *Bantuan Keuangan Peumakmoe Gampoheng*) are allocated via PNPM system rather than via *Musrenbang*. Villagers interviewed by the research team were satisfied with PNPM/BKPG system, as the decisions made in the village were upheld and projects the villagers had suggested became implemented. But, as Saiful Mahdi points out, the PNPM/BKPG system is not unproblematic when it comes to people's participation in decision-making. The system is facilitated by persons hired by the

World Bank program and makes no use of village or sub-district officials. Due to this community leaders are recipients rather than empowered actors in the system. The second problem is that also in the PNPM/BKPG system the villages that have persons with formal education that enables them to prepare project proposals tend to be more successful than other villages in preparing proposals. Furthermore, it is also undefined how the PNPM/BKPG system relates to the national planning system, *Musrenbang*. All in all, it seems that the PNPM/BKPG system does not solve the structural problems of the national planning system but merely bypasses some of them by creating a parallel system. It does not seem to make an effort to identify and support the agents of change in the society.³²

The research team concluded that a better method to solve the structural problems that hinder people to participate in decision-making in South Aceh would be to empower people through improved ways to organise themselves and create effective representation. Creation of interest-based organisations was a key factor in the development of the Scandinavian local governance model that is based on participation. This conclusion did not mean that South Aceh would currently lack people's associations or organisations. To the contrary, both modern and traditional organisations are numerous. There are some four hundred farmers' and fishermen's groups in the district. In addition to these there is a farmers' association (KTNA), a farmers' and fishermen's joint association (HKTI), a labour union (SBSI) and a Chamber of Commerce to support entrepreneurs. In addition to these modern organisations there are traditional *adat* institutions in most socio-economic fields; *Panglima Laot* in fishing; *Keujrun Blang* in wet rice farming; and *Seunebok* in plantation/garden farming to mention the most relevant ones for this report.³³

To return to the question "where do people go with their common problems?", it appears that while there are several structures in place in South Aceh through which people should be

31 Saiful Mahdi's research report, referring to GTZ project ALGAP II.

32 Harry Blair (2012) has come to similar conclusions in his examination of *Musrenbang* and PNPM elsewhere in Indonesia. His study also brings up that efforts to increase participation in local governance in other countries suffer from similar problems.

33 Fadhli Ali's report.

able to bring up their needs and aspirations and find solutions to common problems, all these structures are somewhat malfunctioning. The governmental national development planning mechanism, *Musrenbang*, is perceived to be corrupt and villagers and community leaders have little trust that their proposed projects can be realised through it. The World Bank facilitated National Program for Community Empowerment (PNPM) receives more positive assessment from the communities, as villagers themselves make decisions over which projects are implemented. For village infrastructure projects these two provide some space to participate, but they do not offer much help in participating in policy-making or solving problem related to impartial implementation and access to justice.

Modern interest-based organisations can offer a method to improve people's participation, as through such organisations elected and skilled individuals can represent the interests of a particular group in negotiations with government and other actors. In South Aceh many such modern organisations exist, but their key problem is that they mostly exist on paper. Most of the year these organisations are sleeping and they only become active during the time when government assistance to farmers is being channelled. The organisations are thus merely tools to channel government aid.³⁴ There was an indication that at least some school committees – parental committees that have been established to control how the schools are run and provide input to the School Principal and teachers – also only meet twice a year, in the beginning of each semester, when government assistance to schools is transferred.³⁵

There is no clear indication why people in South Aceh do not make more use of these modern interest-based organisations and try to turn them genuinely representative of their own interests rather than implementing agencies of government programs. Researchers of this project identified some reasons that may make the organisations less attractive. Many organisations, and particularly the traditional ones, do not have strong networks and cooperation with partners outside their own village. Their activities are lim-

ited to their own community, which gives them little power to have impact on the government decisions that are taken above the village level.

The lack of networks also limits access to information and new ideas. School committees do not communicate about their problems and solutions to each other. The study identified some well-functioning school committees, such as a *madrrasah*³⁶ in Tapaktuan that with the help of an active school committee, amongst other initiatives, has organised scholarships for talented children from economically poor families in order to enable them to continue their studies. The researcher Teuku Kemal Fasya concludes that it would be important that the experiences from these committees are communicated to other schools. It also seems that the district-level Education Council (MPD), that could potentially function as the body to forward input from the grassroots to the government, has not taken this role but functions more as a government partner in implementing the government programs. For organisations functioning in the economic field, networking and cooperation with sister organisations would be equally important.

Another problem is the lack of organisations that represent the interests of particular producer groups. It is quite surprising that in a region like South Aceh where several cash crops are produced – nutmeg, patchouli oil, palm-oil, as well some others – there are no strong associations that would represent the interests of the producers of these commodities. National associations of palm oil, rubber or coconut producers do not have branches in South Aceh. The situation seems to be similar within fishing. But there are signs in Aceh that the situation is gradually changing. In Pidie Jaya district the coconut producers have formed their own association. In South Aceh, during the time of our research, an association of nutmeg farmers was established. Patchouli oil farmers were getting organised with assistance of the Czech NGO Caritas program that aimed to empower local farmers to improve the quality of their product and get a better price in the global market.

As organisations are weak or ineffective to represent the interests of citizen groups, strong

34 Fadhli Ali's report.

35 Teuku Kemal Fasya's report.

36 Madrasah is an Islamic school that follows national curriculum, but includes some additional studies on religion.

and innovative individuals take initiative to prepare proposals and start projects. These efforts can have either positive or negative impact on the overall situation depending on how altruistic or egoistic the intentions of the individual are. For example an active School Principal who has connections outside the district may successfully be able to extract funds from the provincial or national level for his own school by bypassing the problematic district-level government department. But if the School Principal is passive he may decide against any action and allow the school buildings and the school's educational capacities to deteriorate. The role of individuals is a determining factor also in other sectors. Individuals with good connections take proposals to Bupati or government departments outside the formal development planning mechanism. The proposals presented by people who are part of a patronage network are processed and accepted – possibly thanks to corruption, though that is difficult to prove – while the proposals based on community needs and collective efforts become sidelined.

The predominant role of individuals is also related to the strongly patriarchal culture of South Aceh that has over the decades been maintained by the hierarchical and centralised bureaucracy. Villagers who are not in a leading position feel that they cannot take initiatives that would bypass the village chief, schoolteachers will leave the initiatives for the School Principal, and in government departments the staff members hesitate to suggest improvements, as they might be perceived as criticism towards the Head of Department. The consequence of this is that all initiatives and all messages from below are highly dependent on particular individuals and on their willingness and capacities to act on behalf of the people. Capable leaders can and have moved masses in South Aceh, as could be observed in 1999 demonstrations demanding referendum for Aceh; in those days South Aceh was a very active district to voice these aspirations.

As citizens perceive that opportunities to influence the decision-making and impartial implementation is limited and that despite the promises old corrupt practices seem to continue, there are increasing frustrations in the society. There have already been some examples that mass ac-

tion has taken destructive rather than constructive forms. In late 2009 the people in Pasie Lembang village showed their frustration towards the government's inability to negotiate a land dispute between the village and the Gunung Leuser National Park by sealing the park agency's office and cutting down hundreds of trees in the national park.³⁷ In the sub-district of Bakongan the frustrated citizens burned down the healthcare centre that they considered was not functioning.³⁸ There have been several demonstrations in the South Aceh district against mining companies or government providing licences for such companies while citizens are not benefiting from these enterprises. To conclude, the capacity for mass action is there in South Aceh, but taking negative and destructive forms.

LACK OF VISION AMONGST THE DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

In order to develop South Aceh needs a clear vision for its future and this vision must be translated into action in the long-term, mid-term and short-term plans. The plans should also be reflected in the district regulations that implement the national and provincial policies. The research team found very little indication that there would be a vision for South Aceh's future amongst the government officials interviewed. More often the district leaders were accusing outside factors – the lack of interest on the side of the province and the central state, or the lack of outside investments – for the bad state of the district. They did not come up with visionary solutions for the problems even when they had an idea what the major problems were. The lack of vision makes the government look pessimistically towards the future and passive in terms of solutions.

Instead of making the necessary changes to turn the course of South Aceh towards a brighter future, the same old practices seem to continue. This can be seen in the ever-increasing government bureaucracy. There are now twenty-seven government units in the district, and no less than

37 Zubaidah Djohar's report.

38 Teuku Kemal Fasya's report.

eighteen sub-districts – two were established in 2011 – and the running of the bureaucracy consumes even more of the district budget than before. There will be even less funds for developing the district and improving public services. In fact, the government bureaucracy should be slimmed and made more efficient, not made fatter and slower. The lack of vision is also visible in the government actions in the field of economy. The government provides small assistance here and there, and has failed to handle the big issues like the nutmeg pest that has had serious impact on one of the main products of the district. There have been no strategic public investments for developing the most potential economic fields. Neither have there been active efforts to attract outside investments. Vocational education has not been developed to serve future needs of the district.

RECOMMENDED SOLUTIONS

A core problem of South Aceh's development is low participation of people and relevant organised interests in policy-making and decision-making. Indonesian Law 25 in 2004 on Development Planning System, established *Musrenbang* as a mechanism that should guarantee people's participation in development planning, but our research shows that *Musrenbang* has not enabled people to participate successfully and fully in development planning processes. In fact, some villagers are so disappointed at *Musrenbang* system that they have stopped coming to the village meetings that should be the basis of participatory development planning. Their frustration has primarily been caused by the fact that the communally made proposals that were based on villagers' own needs and interests were not successful at the upper levels of *Musrenbang* process. They did not know why their proposals "disappeared" and were sidelined by others that were brought through the backdoor by people with connections.

It is obvious that in order to improve people's genuine participation in the decision-making the processes they should be made more transparent particularly at the higher level (district level). In addition to poorly functioning mechanisms for development planning that fail to push through communally agreed development plans,

the civil society organisations and associations are also falling short in their ideal roles in South Aceh. There are hundreds of organisations and workers' groups but they materialise only when government assistance is channelled and fail to represent their groups' interests and aspirations to the government. Either these organisations must be strengthened and transformed or new interest-based organisations and associations be established to represent various groups to the government.

To develop a solution that would improve people's participation in decision-making in South Aceh this project looked into experiences elsewhere. The successful historical Scandinavian experiences of combining welfare and growth were discussed. In the 1930s Scandinavian countries developed mechanisms that would protect them against aggressive capitalism and industrial conflicts, economic depression and poverty. The fundamental condition was that the benefits from the early Keynesian stimulation of the economy and the favorable export markets could be sustained thanks to central level collective agreements between employers' associations and trade unions, with the support of the new social democratic government. It was important that all parties benefited from the agreements. For entrepreneurs the incentive was industrial peace, reasonable wage levels and emerging social security systems handled by state and local government. Through collective agreements the trade unions gained equal wages, particularly benefiting low-wage workers, more jobs and investments and growth also in weaker sectors. Wage earners themselves found security in equal wages and were guaranteed basic social security through the state. Gradually the wage earners also gained influence in the country's executive boards and commissions.

It is obvious that the old Scandinavian model cannot directly be implemented in South Aceh. The situation and preconditions in South Aceh today are in many ways different and less favorable than they were in the 1930s Scandinavian countries. The scale is also different as Scandinavian models were designed for whole countries, while in Aceh we are only focusing on one district in one province. And there are very many different cleavages and weak organisations among employers and laborers as well as farmers and

fishermen. As presented in the introductory pages, wide public engagement and institutionalised forms of issue and interest-based representation were essential to the creation of unique Scandinavian public institutions that are now perceived to be precondition to local participation. And, the agreements on social growth pacts from the 1930s and onwards were not primarily a result of given structural and historical conditions but largely a result of the fostering of well organised employers and labour organisations and the facilitation of agreements by government engagement in industrial and welfare policies. Consequently, the Scandinavian example provided a vision for South Aceh by proving that enabling genuine participation of interest-based groups in public decision-making can enhance both economic growth and improved welfare. In particular, this calls for the development and strengthening of such relevant interest-based organisations among the major production oriented stakeholders in key economic sectors. The Scandinavian experience in that respect is not just the strengthening of such organisations “from below” but also, equally important, the demand for top-down facilitation of favorable channels of influence for the crucial organisations, which in turn helped further developing the organisations as well as created a solid framework for effective popular based policies (Stokke & Törnquist, 2013a).

To develop a particular solution for South Aceh’s situation, the research team recommended that the district government of South Aceh would facilitate production-related, interest-based representation (workers as well as entrepreneurs) in the process of making policies on how to develop the district. This could be done by establishing a forum that brings together government representatives and representatives of interest-based groups of key production sectors. Within this framework special attention would have to be given to the representation of women and perhaps youth as these groups tend to be underrepresented in the existing mechanisms and organisations. Additional actors and institutions (media, NGOs, *adat* leaders etc.) could be enrolled if deemed necessary and agreed upon by the forum members. It is important that such a forum would not be competing and trying to replace any existing planning system but rather complement their

work and assist them to improve participation. Initially the forum should only work for a limited period of time (2-3 years for example) and have clearly defined and jointly agreed tasks. There after the work would have to be evaluated and the best ways ahead decided upon. In Aceh, and in Indonesia, it is relatively easy to establish committees and forums but far more difficult to make them fully functional. A risk is that the forum would become yet another body eating up government funds without much real impact on the overall situation. To avoid these risks the research team looked into experiences elsewhere in the developing countries.

The Indian state of Kerala is an example of attempts to foster locally rooted people’s planning of development. In Kerala the state level planning board with local units was established to facilitate people’s participation in development-planning. The government allocated significant proportions of its development budget for such local planning (30-40 per cent of the planning budget). The local level development planning committees had representation of all key stakeholders. Their work was fully transparent. The decision-making of which development projects to fund and pursue was in the hands of elected politicians in the local councils as well as the planning board. There were certainly frictions due to vested interests, and some were fatal, but these challenges are instructive too and need not be repeated.

Also instructive was the establishment of Brazil’s Porto Alegre participative budgeting system in 1989, to find a way out of the unbearable situation in which the city did not even have sufficient funds for minimum level public works due to corrupt practices and massive numbers of citizens living in shanties that were neither formally existing nor supported. Led by a reformist Mayor, the City Hall started to facilitate people’s participation in budgeting and establish a transparent budgeting system. Gradually increasing number of people were included and the results are visible in improved services and a healthier economic situation. In this case too there have certainly been challenges but less serious than in Kerala and more related to the problems of scaling up on provincial and national levels. It is also crucial to remember, however, that both examples presupposed actively organised citizens in addi-

tion to labor organisations, farmers associations, women groups and more. Importantly, whenever advances were made, these were institutionalised in order not to be dependent on particular political leaders.

Such examples are important to assist South Aceh to design its own model of how to increase participation of people in decision-making. In February 2011 the team presented the research results and the recommended solution to South Aceh government and non-government stakeholders. The response was very positive, as all agreed that the problems raised by the research were real and that there was a need to jointly take action to change the situation. Some were hesitant as to whether a forum would function, considering how many efforts there have been before in Indonesia to facilitate participation. Yet even the skeptics were ready to give it a try. The team then met with a number of politicians from the district council as well as government representatives who were also ready to move forward. With them more detailed discussions were held on how to proceed in practice.

South Aceh district government planning agency, *Bappeda*, was considered to be the best government body to take the leading role and coordinate the forum, both because of its central role in development and for the fact that at the time when research results were discussed it was led by a progressive-minded person whom the research team found particularly committed to the project. In addition to stakeholders mentioned above, committed researchers and experts will also be needed to assist the forum in its work. The Forum's tasks would include research, planning, facilitation, coordination and supervision of development programs. All its work must be transparent and open to public scrutiny. The Forum would have the right to suggest how substantial parts of the development budget should be used in the two target areas that were decided in the meeting where the idea was discussed: fisheries and plantation agriculture (*perkebunan*).³⁹ The Forum would, however, not play any role in implementing programs, though it would work closely together with other development agencies.

All decisions over accepting proposals would remain to be taken by the district council. To implement the committee's proposals, the local and provincial government should be prepared to engage with relevant universal welfare measures to facilitate agreements between the interest representatives to foster development. Additionally, in implementing the proposals, many additional government units, administrators as well as actors in society are to be involved.

A major factor to launch the implementation would be an ICLD facilitated municipality exchange program between South Aceh and a Swedish municipality to be identified by ICLD. The implementing organisations of the research project, the Aceh Institute and ICAIOS, were also willing to further support the establishment of the Forum. The process would be documented and analysed by participating researchers. Unfortunately, at the time of the writing this report, despite numerous attempts, the ICLD had not been successful in identifying an interested Swedish municipality. Consequently the implementation was stalled. Meanwhile the political conditions at the provincial level in Aceh have also become less favourable to implementation of the project's recommendation. This is largely due to the fact that the PA gained almost total political (and economic) hegemony in the province in 2012 elections. The ruling party PA with its conservative leadership is likely to favour a status quo situation of "transitional politics and economy" rather than contribute positively to efforts to empower diverse political and other interest groups. On the other hand, the 2013 District Head election in South Aceh indicated that the district chose to go against PA's hegemony, and brought representatives of the national party coalition to power. Due to these changes in the political situation and because the support of district leaders is a crucial factor in successful implementation of the research recommendations, any action towards continuation of the research project should be done only after careful reassessment of the situation and in consultation with the concerned researchers and local actors who participated in the project through consultative groups.

³⁹ These two sectors were selected, because they have highest potential of providing employment and economic growth.

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