

‘Perelek’ in Sunda Region of Purwakarta: The Role of Indigenous Institution in Community-based Development in Indonesia

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Abstract: Community-based Development has been suggested to support the development at the community level. The role of indigenous institutions and the Influence of Culture have been considered in the implementation of Community-based Development approach. An Indigenous Institution of ‘Perelek’ is an institution which has been implemented the principle of ‘gotong-royong’(communality and mutual assistance) among Sundanese people at the rura area of Purwakarta. The practice of the institution has shown that a bottom-up approach development could effectively supports the achievement of development objective – to increase wellbeing- at the community level.

1 INTRODUCTION

The main objective of development is to achieve human wellbeing, both individually and socially. While Allen (2000) seek development encompasses multidisciplinary branch of social sciences, including economy and sociology, some development planners have put their emphasis more on the economic aspects of development, rather than other aspects of human being and the society. This particular attention has been elaborated by Leys (2005).

The work of White (2009) has indicated that wellbeing should be measured not only by economic (material) dimension, but also human and social factors. In this context, wellbeing should be related to not only individual aspects of measurement, but also to the social context, which individual human are living with. While Shaffer, Deller and Marcouiller (2006) mentioned ‘community’ as the important factor to be included in the discourse of development, earlier work by Warren, Slikkerveer & Brokensha (1995) have underscored the importance to incorporate cultural dimension in the development. Similarly, Marsden (1994) has also criticised development planners who neglected cultural inclusion in the development at the community level. Woodley *et al* (2006) stated that *“despite of the fact that development planners aim to optimise development and reduce disparity between the rich*

and the poor, but they often do that without acknowledging the indigenous people’s food and livelihood systems”.

Culture is a way of life and systems of conduct. It is immaterial in one side, but also contains material objects, which are related to human activity. Kohls & Waderspahn (2012) defined culture as ‘integrated system of learned behaviour patterns that are characteristic of the members of any given society. It refers to the total way of life for a particular group of people. It includes [what] a group of people thinks, says, does and makes—its customs, language, material artefacts and shared systems of attitudes and feelings”.

As a country with thousands of Islands and hundreds of ethno-cultural groups, Indonesia has been developed for many years – including pre and post colonialism times – whereby, culture played an important role in the development. One of the cultures which has been contributed for many generations in various processes of development in Indonesia is ‘*Gotong-royong*’ : an indigenous institution of communality and mutual assistance, is one of the cultural traditions in Indonesia, which has survived for many generations to provide a strong identity to Indonesia’s village culture. It is manifested in the form of individual behaviour or an action to do something together for the sake of mutual interest for the community. According to Koentjaraningat (1961), ‘*Gotong Royong*’ has been empowered local

people of Indonesia. Various problems of common life could be solved easily and cheaply through community development activities.

The culture of communality and mutual assistance, in fact, has been also implemented in many countries which have strong cultural base. For instance, a local institution of '*gadugi*' in North America, which shows a cooperative labour where men and women work together voluntarily to help the group of elderly with their housing and health care. Similarly, the institution of '*talkoot*' is well known referring to voluntary social work and gatherings in Finland and some other Northern European countries. In the Mediterranean Region, '*Imece*' refers to the village-based collaboration in Turkey, such as joining forces to build a common road, a bridge or a community center.

This paper elaborates the concept and practice of indigenous institution of '*Perelek*', which has been implemented the culture of '*gotong-royong*' among local people in Sundanese Region of West Java, particularly in Purwakarta district. By using a descriptive analysis, this paper shows that the institution has been contributed to the community-based development in Indonesia.

2 THE CONCEPT AND PRACTICE OF 'Perelek'

This section elaborates the concepts and origins of an indigenous institution of '*Perelek*'. It encompasses from the literal definition of the institution to the historical analysis of the institution in Sundanese rural area of West Java.

2.1 'Perelek' and Its Origins

The indigenous institution of '*Perelek*' or '*Beas Perelek*' is a community empowerment practice, where people at the community, gathered together in collecting paddy rice from each household member of the community. Rusnandar (2016) refers '*Perelek*' to a collection process of paddy rice by assigned members of a community. Every day, each household of a community – mostly in rural area- collect about one-spoon of paddy rice and store it into a storage box, which is made by wooden-bamboo and hung in front of the house. The assigned members of the community will collect the paddy-rice from the bamboo-storage box and put them into a community-storage (barn). The collected paddy-rice, will be utilised by the community members for any

community purpose, *i.e.* helping the poor member of the community, supporting the community programmes, etc. Literally, '*Perelek*' has no meaning. It was taken from the 'sound' of paddy rice when it is put into the 'bamboo-storage' (Setiawan, *pers.comm* 2017).



Figure 1. The Major of Purwakarta demonstrates the Installation of Wooden-Storage box of '*Perelek*'
Source: Detik.com (2016)

The historical origins of the institution have various verses. Sekaningrum (2008) for instance, stated that the institution has been practiced in the Sundanese region of West Java since 1940s, while Setiawan (2017) believes that the tradition has been implemented in the Sundanese regions since the Sundanese people work as paddy farmers, due to the use of paddy-rice in the practice of '*Perelek*'. It has not only a practical meaning of communality and mutual assistance, but also as a reflection of Sundanese cosmovision.

According to Sundanese belief, Paddy has an important meaning for the people. It is believed that Paddy was originated from the spirit of *Nyi Pohaci*, one of the Gods in Sundanese mythology. Therefore, people should utilise paddy correctly, following the Sundanese cosmology of *Tritangtu*, which suggest to implement *life-balance* between human, the God(s) and the universe. In the utilisation of paddy-rice, Sundanese has its particular indigenous management: *padaringan*, *goah*, *leuit*, and *lumbung*. *Padaringan* is a paddy-rice storage for short-term purposes, while '*goah*' is a paddy-rice storage, located in every indigenous house of Sundanese. The rice in the '*goah*' could only be consumed for family purposes. For a long-term purpose, Sundanese family has a storage-house, named '*leuit*'. The rice in this indigenous storage-house, will be utilised by the family during a famine season. Lastly, for a public purpose, Sundanese has a community-storage named '*lumbung*' (barn). The indigenous institution of '*Perelek*' is a mechanism whereby the assigned

community members collect the paddy-rice from each of community members' houses. The paddy-rice in this community storage, will be used to help other community members who are in need. (Sumardjo *pers.comm* 2017).

The practice of 'Perelek' is a manifestation of how human being should treat other human being by utilisation natural resources, as a reflection to their Gods who command human being to do good deeds with other human and the universe. The institution is also implementing the principle of reciprocity in social interaction, which is influenced by the Sundanese wisdom of 'silih asah' (mutual support), 'silih asih' (mutual love), and 'silih asuh' (mutual care).

2.2 The Practice of 'Perelek' in Purwakarta District of West Java

Purwakarta is one of the districts in West Java Province, located in the Central-East of the province and has 17 sub-districts and 192 villages. According to the Statistics of Purwakarta (2016), the district has 910,007 inhabitants with 463,506 of males and 446,501 of females. The population density of of the district is 879 people per km². Majority of the populations work in Trading and Services (24.63%), followed by manufacturing industries (22.04%), Agriculture (17.98%), Individual, Public and Social Sectors (13.23%) and others (22.12%). The labor sector has been changed dramatically for the last decade, which in 2008, Agriculture was the major occupation of the people of Purwakarta. (Statistics of Purwakarta 2016).

With Sundanese as the majority of ethno-cultural groups in Purwakarta, the district is the only local government in West Java, which has a formal policy and regulation that supports the implementation of Indigenous Institution of 'Perelek'. The practice of 'Perelek' is regulated under the law of Purwakarta district, through the Major's decree in 2016, as part of food-security programmes in the district. According to the regulation, each of households should contribute every day a half-glass of paddy rice to be collected by the community leader and stored in the community-storage. The collected paddy rice will be used to help any community members who are in need. Since the Major supported the practice of 'Perelek', the practice of the indigenous institution became a society movement and has been implemented by all villages in the district. The movement has been successfully collected hundreds of tons of paddy rice in only six months of its implementation, helped numerous poor people in the

whole villages. The utilisation of its collected rice has also been transformed into money, which was then used for building infrastructure in the community, charity for teachers, orphans, as well as drainage system at the community.

The Table 1 reveals the collected paddy rice in 17 sub-districts of Purwakarta. The institution has collected both the paddy rice and the money with the outreach of hundred of thousand litres and hundreds of million rupiah. In Benteng village, one of the villages which the authors did an observation, each month, the community leader, with the help of assigned community members, will collect the paddy rice from every household and stored in the community-storage. In terms of the utilisation, the village made a village policy that the usage of paddy rice will be allocated to five categories: 1) to support the funeral of community members who passed away; 2) to support the cleanliness program at the village; 3) to support the life of elderly; 4) to support the orphans; and 5) to support health-care of community members.

Table 1: The Outreach of 'Perelek' in 17 sub-districts of Purwakarta.

Kecamatan	Beras (liter)	Uang (dalam ribu)
Babakancikao	10462	56358213
Bojong	9036	2548955
Bungursari	21074	53975902
Campaka	12561	32387903
Cibatu	11927	26894548
Darangdan	6883	4385771
Jatiluhur	9777	14116546
Kiarapedes	147918	20782221
Maniis	8086	169977959
Pasawahan	20816	11486202
Plered	-25107	50686183
Pondoksalam	6748	443750
Purwakarta	27768	22948679
Sukasari	690	2900678
Sukatani	33510	42184079
Tegalwaru	11412	2782453
Wanayasa	9260	14830566

Source: Purwakarta District Government (2017)

In Cirende village, the practice of 'Perelek' has a slight different in terms of mechanism of collection. Instead of storing the collected-rice at the community-storage, the community decides to collect them in their community leader, who knows all conditions of the community members. The utilisation of collected rice, is managed by the community leader, and distributed to the following

programmes of assistance: 1) to help poor family with 5 litres of rice every month; 2) to support the orphans; 3) to support the funeral of the community members who passed away; 4) to support financially the religious teacher at the community; and 5) to help the community members who are ill by giving them necessary supports (Kasumaningrum *Field Note*. 2017).

3 THE ROLE OF 'Perelek' IN THE COMMUNITY-BASED DEVELOPMENT

Community-based Development has been suggested by many studies (Uphoff 1992; Marsden 1994; Warren, Slikkerveer & Brokensha 1995; Shaffer, Deller and Marcouiller 2006; and Woodley *et al.* 2006). It has supported not only the development at the community level, which is subject to various cultural factors, but also empowering the local people to participate in the process of development from the bottom.

The practice of indigenous institution of 'Perelek' has shown that the community members have their initiatives to participate in the development. Through the collection of paddy rice, the community members were helping each other in order to increase their wellbeing. The support of community members have also demonstrated that the indigenous principle of 'gotong-royong' has been effectively implemented to support the community members. Moreover, the principle of reciprocity of 'silih asah' (mutual support), 'silih asih' (mutual love), and 'silih asuh' (mutual care) has also been implemented. It shows that the Sundanese cosmology of Tritangtu, which suggest to have a balance-relationship between Human, the Universe and the God(s), has influenced the people of Purwakarta in the implementation of 'Perelek'.

Through the utilisation of 'Perelek', *i.e.* helping the poor, supports the elderly, and assisting the orphans, the practice of the programme has shown that the indigenous institution has supported the development process to achieve wellbeing of the community members.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Community-based Development has been suggested to support the development at the community level, by incorporating cultural factors in the development.

In this context, the role of indigenous institution and local participation are highlighted in the development plan and processes.

The practice of indigenous institution of 'Perelek' has been successfully implemented as an example of bottom-up approach of development. The implementation, has been influenced by the Sundanese cosmology of Tritangtu and implemented Sundanese principle of reciprocity of 'silih asah' (mutual support), 'silih asih' (mutual love), and 'silih asuh' (mutual care). The practice of 'Perelek' in Purwakarta district of West Java has shown that the institution has supported the achievement of development objective, to reach wellbeing of the community, by helping poor family, the elderly, the orphans, etc.

While there are some doubts on the role of indigenous institutions in development, the example of 'Perelek' has answered oppositely. As Indonesia has hundreds of ethno-cultural groups, this paper suggest that any development planners should consider to further implement the cultural-based development at the community level, by considering their cultural identities and implementing development approaches, which are suitable for each of the conditions of the community.

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