

# Caring for the Marginal: Developing Papua as a Growth Centre

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Papua, at the eastern edge of the Indonesian Archipelago, has long been identified as lagging in its economic, and social development. A lack of infrastructure has limited its advancement, and as such, efforts to develop Papua as a growth centre have faced severe obstacles. A majority of studies have examined Papua by using a structural approach, rather than through the Papuans' own perspectives. This study seeks to explain how an emic approach is necessary for empowerment, arguing that this offers an affirmative means of addressing the situation. This article identifies four empowerment strategies that may be used, including: protecting traditional communities, building capacity, guaranteeing access, and promoting independence. A caring, and affirmative development paradigm is necessary to apply these strategies.

**Key words:** *Marginal area, Local development, Growth centre, Affirmative action, State intervention.*

## Introduction

The Papua Highlands Region (PHR), which consists of sixteen regencies covering 80,026 kilometres squared, continues to experience socio-economic difficulty, and inequality. As the region's 2.1 million residents face limited communication, and transportation infrastructure, widespread pestilence, and poor education, the PHR has remained isolated, and underdeveloped. This is exacerbated by its distance from existing growth centres, and its residents' continued dependence upon nature, which leaves them vulnerable to natural disasters, and other dangers.

Often, the residents of the PHR live on the brink. The limited availability of food leaves them prone to malnutrition and illness, while the lack of schooling limits their knowledge, and consequently, their entrepreneurial, and employment opportunities. They live in want, being unable to guarantee that individuals, families, and communities can meet their basic, and strategic needs. These shortcomings have had social, and cultural implications, creating exclusivity within communities, and interpersonal relations. Likewise, these limitations have cultivated a narrowmindedness, which promotes conflict, and unrest.

The disparity between the Papuans, and other communities in the PHR is further exacerbated by social, economic, and political inequality. This includes, for instance, inequal access to public facilities, inequal fulfilment of basic needs, inequal political participation, and inequal protection of public rights. This has become an acute problem, and one that not only requires transformative, and affirmative policy, and action within Papua, but also a broader concern for and commitment to equality, including in political opportunities, intellectual development, and citizenship rights.

Structuralists have argued that economic rights, including the right to employment, can be fulfilled if the State's development processes depart from conducive social conditions, and promote the creation of social change (Budiman, 1993). This article seeks to recommend new policy directions for empowering the PHR and ensuring that it is equal to more developed regions, and communities. As such, this article will begin by mapping the infrastructural, structural, and cultural problems that plague the PHR, showing the objective reality that must be overcome. It then proposes seven new policy directions through which the PHR may be developed into a growth centre.

### **Challenges to Regional Development in Indonesia**

Development has not simply been accepted as a *directive*, and *generic* concept, but has been defined diversely. Generally, however, development has been understood as involving economic betterment, and advancement. This has been problematic, as there is no shared understanding of what indicators must be improved to promote economic development (Abdullah, 2016). It raises the questions: should economic development involve the exploitation of all available social, and cultural resources? Or can it involve social, and cultural development that can promote economic betterment? These questions are crucial, as they involve not only how society, and culture are positioned within development processes, but also the very paradigm that drives planned, and sustainable change (Pfau-Effinger, 2017). Three main factors must be considered: infrastructure, structure, and culture.

Development processes differ in their historical roots, and the experiences of a developing country will vary from those of other developing countries, and, needless to say, those of

developed countries. Polanyi (2003) illustrated how development processes beget transformation, particularly as the resources of the poor, and marginal are targeted by those in power (Wijaya, 2017). This issue has been rampant in Indonesia (Abdullah, 1999), being manifested through forced eviction, eminent domain, and the abrogation of communal rights. It may thus be argued that infrastructure problems are not caused solely by the limited availability of resources, but also by the mismanagement of available resources. In isolated areas such as the PHR, the unavailability of infrastructure, as well as the lack of control mechanisms, limits the effect of community development (Arifah & Kusumastuti, 2019). The communities' lack of resources, education, health, and security, has a deleterious effect on their lives (McCormick, 2018).

The problems with infrastructure in Indonesia have had negative consequences for food, health, and education in the country (Anas, Riana, & Apsari, 2015). Similarly, secondary facilities, such as entertainment venues, houses of worship, and parks, are rare. The important tertiary facilities, such as roads, and public transportation, are also unavailable (Suriadi, Kundjono, & Osnidar, 2010). If these infrastructural shortcomings are not addressed, significant problems will occur. Take, for example, the malnutrition, and disease that have continued to plague Indonesians, owing to the limited health infrastructure (Ismail et al., 2015).

These problems are not ahistorical, instead being deeply rooted in Indonesian history. The government after government has sought to provide Indonesians with a better quality of life. However, these desires have gone unfulfilled, as actors have limited their involvement, and been unwilling to synergise (Elias & Noone, 2011). The Government has shown little goodwill in its resource management, blaming the lack of infrastructure on Indonesians' inability to access public services. This narrative positions the people, themselves, as being unwilling to achieve their goals, and improve their conditions. Ultimately, despite the cornucopia of natural resources available in the archipelago, more than 24.7 million Indonesians live below the poverty line.

The abundant natural resources are not, in and of themselves, sufficient to promote human development or guarantee competitiveness on the free market. Indonesians have had difficulty maintaining their control of resources on land, and at sea (Muhammad, 2012; Bailey & Sumaila, 2015). The scarcity has continued to influence all aspects of development.

The development processes in Indonesia have been hampered by the inequal power relations between those in power (i.e. the government), and the purported targets of their programs (i.e. the populace) (Hidayat, 2008). In the current structure, the common people are exploited and marginalised as objects of exploitation, and marginalisation. The Government programs primarily benefit the elites (Baswir et al., 2003), and other persons with power, and this

exacerbates inequality (Lin, 2000; Neckerman, 2004). Such structural issues are evident everywhere, including in the relationships between the East and West, village and city, Java and not-Java, indigenous and non-indigenous, male and female, and elite and public, as well as the various social transactions (Daryanto, 2003; Syawie, 2013). They are also evident in Papua's interactions with other parts of Indonesia.

Such structural inequalities may be attributed to three factors. First, Indonesia's human resources are concentrated in political, economic, educational, and social centres (Kurniawan, 2017). The areas which are distant from these centres of development do not receive the same facilities, and access. Second, the structural inequality may be attributed to centralised 'national policies', wherein the central government continues to dominate policy, despite having implemented decentralisation (Jati, 2012). Moreover, the local participation remains limited. Third, the elected representatives' goodwill, and capacity are wanting, even though their support is solely needed. As stated by Polanyi, the Government, as with industry, has a formal social function that it must fulfill (Polanyi, 2003: 317).

## Methods

This article is based on qualitative research. The data were collected through two approaches, namely observation, and literature review. The observations were held in the City of Jayapura, and within two districts in West Papua. The aspects to be considered concern the landscape, and ethnoscape, which show the quality of infrastructure, and people's lives, both in cities, and villages. The various facilities available are used as indicators to show the regional marginal status within a broader development framework. In particular, three aspects were taken into account in this observation process, namely the physical appearance showing spatial planning, the social structure showing social strata, and the development of community knowledge, as part of cultural transformation (Abdullah et al., 2019).

The literature collected is used to support the observational, and interview data, specifically to show two things. First, to show the comparison of the level of development between the Papua region as the local with a national context, and second, for the processual analysis that has given birth to marginalism in eastern Indonesia. This study forms part of the answer to common questions about why the eastern part of Indonesia has experienced slow development. A comparison between the regions, and the centre through existing documents will explain the underdevelopment of both economic, and social dimensions in the Papua region. The discourse that develops daily is also considered in the analysis process.

### **Findings: Cultural and Structural Marginalism**

The transition from the New Order to the Reform, and Post-Reform orders has yet to provide Indonesians with much desired change. The various forms of structural inequality continue to plague the country. For example, the gender mainstreaming movement has been unable to effect any fundamental change, even as it has improved the public awareness of women's rights. Likewise, the efforts to empower marginalised groups, such as the poor, have been ineffective, as they have failed to recognise the objective conditions and needs of their beneficiaries. Significant institutional support and funding are thus required to ensure that efforts to empower the residents of the PHR are systematic, and sustainable.

These ongoing structural issues have not been addressed adequately, and consequently, public needs continue to go unfulfilled. This has had a deleterious effect on Indonesia's ongoing development programs (Widiastuti, 2010; Wijaya, 2017). For instance, planned increases in education funding, intended to improve the quality of Indonesia's human resources, have yet to be properly realised. The Government has argued that insufficient money is available, even though it is constitutionally obligated to educate Indonesians (Fallis, 2013). Owing to such inequality, development has been centralised rather than distributed, and as such, human resources are seriously lacking in isolated regions. The Government must thus increase its commitment to reducing structural inequality (Bukhari, 2019).

The national policy must become truly people-oriented, and recognise traditional rights, rather than claim such an orientation, in order to conceal its true intentions (Muazzin, 2014). Justice and equality have been hot-button issues in Indonesia since political reform began in 1998. However, these issues have only been debated in academic, and legal circles; their actualisation in the field has been lacking. Traditional communities continue to exist in a state of precarity, not only being disenfranchised but also having their very humanity threatened (Astarika, 2016).

Scholars have argued that cultural, and ethnic diversity is a two-edged sword. Where properly managed, difference and distinction can prove truly beneficial. Conversely, where such diversity is poorly managed, development processes will be hindered. The ethnic, religious, and racial unrest that has plagued Indonesia in recent years provides a grim portrait of the consequences of diversity mismanagement, where suspicion shapes the interactions of individuals, and groups. Without proper management, and communication, individuals will draw mistaken conclusions about others, and this provides a fertile ground for conflict.

Cultural obstacles emerge as a result of cultural factors, be they the cultural system itself, the social system involved or the physical manifestations of culture. This reflects Koentjaraningrat's argument that culture consists of three components: the cultural system,

social system, and artifacts. The mismanagement of any of these components can stymie development (Koentjaraningrat, 1980).

Cultural obstacles may be caused by different norms and approaches to interpreting everyday life experiences. Communities embrace particular values, rules, and paradigms, which differ from those of other communities, and thus produce different interpretations. Without cross-cultural communication, this diversity will hinder the development process. The distance between these communities, such as the thousands of kilometres separating policymakers in Jakarta, and the residents of the PHR, only exaggerates such differences. Physical artifacts, the most tangible components of culture, also inform all stages of the development process. Without mutual understanding, development can never be achieved.

Where cultural systems are not understood as integrating norms, values, ideas, and rules, heterogeneity will become an obstacle to intercultural relations. As such, it is necessary to recognise and understand how cultural systems, and values can be internalised as a means of avoiding conflict. In Indonesia, particularly in Papua, cultural and religious factors continue to hinder development. Interethnic, and intercultural conflict continues to taint development efforts. This has been exacerbated by exclusivist tendencies, wherein urban life is perceived as being better than rural life, and communities tend to denigrate others. However, if these cultural, customary, and religious differences were properly managed, they could prove themselves as a boon to the social order. The cultural, and social heterogeneity can create solidarity, and this can support development.

Such infrastructural, structural, and cultural factors provide an important context for development in the PHR, particularly since a comprehensive response is necessary to resolve the region's ongoing problems. Only by addressing these issues, can the PHR be transformed into a growth centre.

Development — no matter how it, and its indicators are understood — is an inexorable part of human existence. The main issue is how development can be configured. On the one hand, development is closely linked to broader political, and economic interests, and thus incorporates national, and international values — even though Soedjatmoko has argued that “economic development is not solely an economic process, but also an amalgamation of social and cultural change” (1983:21). Such changes have become increasingly recognised as experts have sought to offer alternative perspectives of how development policies can promote the betterment of humanity.

### **Discussion: Policy Directions**

From the above discussion, two key points may be identified. First, it is necessary to apply an approach to development that positions the process as forefronting the interests of traditional communities. Second, development practices should ideally fulfil diverse communities' needs, and enable them to continually better themselves over time, rather than create disparity. Developing the PHR as a growth centre means answering the question, “what is the relationship between our wealth, and our ability to live as we would like?” (Sen, 2007). Empowering local communities and giving them the ability to optimally utilise the available resources, can only improve their quality of life (Bukhari et al., 2019).

Developing a region into a growth centre involves various actors, including academics, entrepreneurs, governments, and local communities. Indeed, given that the public is the most affected by development programs (Korten, 1986), its involvement in such schemes cannot be denied. The public must be included in policymaking and setting, as only then can the Government, and its private-sector allies promote its betterment. Similarly, good government–business relations facilitate the sectoral capacity-building. Academics, meanwhile, can contribute their wisdom, and knowledge to improve policy, and ensure its applicability, and sustainability. To develop the PHR as a growth centre, seven policy directions may be taken.

First, the PHR requires a commodity that can provide a cornerstone for its development, one that can replace the district- and village-oriented ‘one commodity, one area’ program. Such a commodity must not only meet all applicable standards, but also be made continuously, and sustainably available. It may use materials that are readily available in the region or it may be targeted at specific market segments. Once an appropriate commodity is identified, it is necessary to plan the development of relevant technologies, and analyse market demands, and expectations. The residents' abilities to produce or process such commodities must be improved, for which they will most likely require outside assistance.

Second, jobs must be created in the region. The identification and promotion of commodities will create new employment opportunities. The creation of new jobs will enable local residents, particularly youths, to not only improve their economic situation, but also to implement broader social changes in their communities. This, in turn, will allow communities to improve their quality of life, prosperity, health, education, security, and stability. However, this will only become possible after systematic industrialisation has occurred.

Third, infrastructure must be improved to facilitate the transportation of people, and cargo. This, in turn, will allow new ideas, values, and goods to enter the region. More specifically, transportation facilities must be constructed to promote the mobilisation of human, and

material resources. Similarly, markets, and communication networks must be constructed to facilitate communication, and mobility. A lack of infrastructure has been the main obstacle to empowerment, and development in the PHR, particularly given the region's distance from the existing development centres.

Fourth, institutional empowerment is necessary to promote growth (Ikhwansyah, 2020). The empowerment of customary, and social institutions is fundamental for capacity-building, as such institutions provide communities with the means of responding to adversity and fulfilling their wants — especially when formal institutions underperform or are entirely unavailable. Customary, and social institutions are of paramount importance in areas where government performance is lacking. Conversely, where the Government, and its institutions are established, these institutions tend to weaken. Weaker institutions require development to guarantee their sustainability, particularly where they are threatened by formal institutions, and State policies.

Fifth, the education, health, and service sectors must be developed. All of these sectors are necessary for creating a climate that is conducive for transforming traditional communities into centres of development. It cannot be denied that improved health, and education, as well as the availability of employment opportunities, appropriate housing, and a clean and conducive environment, are necessary for improving the quality of life. These are still lacking in the PHR, and improving these sectors requires social, economic, and political development.

Sixth, human resources must be developed. It cannot be denied that human resources are key to regional success. Although human resources are often ignored because they cannot be readily quantified, it cannot be denied that improving these resources can address such problems as backwardness, and disenfranchisement. Consequently, human resources must be developed, no matter the cost. Two approaches may be used. First, the public must understand how to fulfil their everyday wants, and needs. Second, they must create societal leaders who are willing to emphasise the importance of formal education, and from the elementary level through to the university level.

Seventh, the PHR must be integrated into national, and global networks. Information and telecommunication systems are particularly relevant, not only to connect the PHR with the outside world, but also to integrate its residents in national, and global ideologies, values, institutions, and practices. The PHR must not be seen as existing beyond the realm of civilisation, prosperity, intellectualism, modernity, and technology, but rather as an integral part of the legal, social, economic, and environmental system. Integrating the PHR into global, and national networks will not only ensure that its residents' rights, and traditional

identities are recognised (Tauli-Corpuz, 2007: 93), but also enable them to access public facilities, and services.

## **Conclusion**

Regional development processes are generally oriented towards addressing regional shortcomings and meet communities' needs. Only rarely do such processes depart from an understanding of regional strengths. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has framed such development as necessary for promoting human rights and advancing communities' interests. In its report, the UNDP stated:

“It is increasingly recognized that indigenous peoples remain poor, nor because they do not have the resources or knowledge to change their situation, but because they have been denied of their rights to have control and access to their resources and protection of their traditional knowledge” (Tauli-Corpuz, 2007: 95).

Although this report is somewhat excessive in its framing of communities' knowledge, and control of resources, its central point about rights, and potential must provide the cornerstone for development.

As such, several points may be used as the basis for formulating better policy for developing the PHR into a centre of growth. First, the people of the PHR must be protected from all direct, and indirect threats, be they threats to their physical wellbeing, to their mobility or to their cultural, and social values. This includes the threat of unmitigated modernisation, and improperly targeted policies. Many cases have shown that such threats, if left unaddressed, will only grow over time.

Second, the communities' capacity must be improved in order to enable them to endure in the face of various social, political, economic, and environmental threats. Improving public knowledge will promote diversity in interpretations, attitudes, and problem-solving approaches. Skill-building will also enable communities to resolve their own issues, fulfil their own needs, and address their own problems. At the same time, local institutions must also develop their own capacity to support, and provide guidance to local communities, as they deal with external threats.

Third, communities must be granted increased access to resources, and employment opportunities in order to ensure that their basic, functional, and strategic needs are fulfilled. The mechanisms for distributing resources to the public will enable the Government to improve residents' ability to survive and grow. Such improvement is highly structural, and



thus requires significant institutional support to ensure that sufficient knowledge, and technologies are made available.

Fourth, communities must be given the liberty to manage their own lives, fulfil their own needs, and to resolve the problems they face. To develop such liberty, communities require a sustainable source of income that can provide them with the resources, and agency necessary for sectoral development. Such efforts are fundamental for development, and as such must be implemented before the PHR can be transformed into a centre of growth.

To achieve empowerment, and liberty, communities also require persons with tertiary education (2–5 per cent of the population) to become agents of change, and link them with academics, the private sector, and the Government. Only then, can communication be facilitated, and synergy created.

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