

The Optimization Management of Special Autonomy Funds for Acehese People Welfare

Effendi Hasan^{1,*}, Dahlawi², Ubaidullah¹, Novita Sari², Nofriadi² and Helmi²

¹Lecture of Political Science at Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Syiah Kuala, Campus Universitas Syiah Kuala, Darussalam-Banda Aceh, Indonesia

²Lecture of Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Syiah Kuala, Campus Universitas Syiah Kuala, Darussalam-Banda Aceh, Indonesia

Abstract: This research aimed to examine the factors contributing to the less optimum management of the Aceh special autonomy funds for the development and welfare of the Acehese people. Specifically, Aceh received the special autonomy funds of IDR 56.67 trillion from 2008 to 2018, yet the vast funds have not been successful in change the face of Aceh in terms of poverty, unemployment, and other social diseases. This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design and data collection involved interviews, observation, and document study. The informants were selected by purposive and snowball sampling. The results of the study showed that three factors contributed to the less optimum management of the Aceh special autonomy funds. First, the regulation of the Aceh special autonomy funds management has not been standardized and frequently changed, and thus it cannot be used as a complete guideline. Second, the management authority of the special autonomy funds was unclear between the provincial and the district/city government, resulting in no good coordination between the parties. Third, the poor management of the Aceh special autonomy funds led to the poorly targeted development and community empowerment. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that these three factors hindered the Aceh special autonomy funds from fulfilling the goals of realizing the development and welfare for the Acehese people.

Keywords: Special Autonomy Funds, Management, Welfare, Development, Acehese people.

1. INTRODUCTION

Aceh is a province in Indonesia with a particular authority granted after the MoU to regulate its governance following the system and principles of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. The country recognition of Aceh's special authority has been governed in Law No. 11 of 2006 concerning the Government of Aceh (UUPA). UUPA is also a political policy that must be established by the Indonesian government and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) to end the 32-years Aceh conflict.

This consideration is an effort to resolve the conflict that originated from the complaint concerning the central government's lack of appreciation for the Acehese identity that ended in a lawsuit for the injustice and the threat to secede from the Republic of Indonesia. This context is consistent with the Joachim Wehner's typology of asymmetric decentralization (Robert Endi Jaweng, 2011: 164), at least two primary considerations lead to asymmetrical decentralization. First, political considerations, namely in response to diversity, the differences level and ethnicity tension, regional character, religion, etc. Second, efficiency considerations, aiming to strengthen the capacity of

local governments to manage the economy and government administration effectively.

The fundamental problem in this study is that despite the asymmetric decentralization in Aceh with its funding of IDR. 56.67 trillion, Aceh remains unchanged. The vast funding should have been able to realize the development and welfare for Acehese people, instead of the poverty, unemployment, social disease, and corruption are increasing. The special autonomy funds have not transformed the lower class of society at all, nor they have benefited from the funds. Hence, this condition widens the gap further in Aceh after the implementation of asymmetric decentralization. The annual Aceh special autonomy funds are presented in Table 1:

Table 1: Aceh Special Autonomy Funds from 2008-2018

YEAR	BUDGET
2008	IDR 3.5 trillion
2009	IDR 3.7 trillion
2010	IDR 3.8 trillion
2011	IDR 4.5 trillion
2012	IDR 5.4 trillion
2013	IDR 6.1 trillion
2014	IDR 8.1 trillion
2015	IDR 7.6 trillion
2016	IDR 7.7 trillion
2017	IDR 7.9 trillion
2018	IDR 8 trillion

Source: Bappeda Aceh (2018).

*Address correspondence to this author at the Lecture of Political Science at Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Syiah Kuala, Campus Universitas Syiah Kuala, Darussalam-Banda Aceh, Indonesia; E-mail: effendi@unsyiah.ac.id

Table 2: Poverty Ranking Percentage Data of 23 Districts/Cities in Aceh

NO	District/City	Percentage of the Poor Population Per district/ city		The comparison between 2016 and 2017
		2016	2017	
1	Aceh Singkil	21.60	22.11	Increasing
2	Gayo Lues	21.86	21.97	Increasing
3	Pidie Jaya	21.18	21.82	Increasing
4	Pidie	21.25	21.43	Increasing
5	Bener Meriah	21.43	21.14	Decreasing
6	Aceh Barat	20.38	20.28	Decreasing
7	Simeulue	19.93	20.20	Increasing
8	Subulussalam	19.57	19.71	Increasing
9	Aceh Utara	19.46	19.78	Increasing
10	Nagan Raya	19.25	19.34	Increasing
11	Aceh Barat Daya	18.03	18.31	Increasing
12	Sabang	17.33	17.66	Increasing
13	Aceh Tengah	16.64	16.84	Increasing
14	Bireuen	15.95	15.87	Decreasing
15	Aceh Besar	15.55	15.41	Decreasing
16	Aceh Timur	15.06	15.25	Increasing
17	Aceh Tenggara	14.46	14.86	Increasing
18	Aceh Jaya	15.01	14.85	Decreasing
19	Aceh Tamiang	14.51	14.69	Increasing
20	Aceh Selatan	13.48	14.07	Increasing
21	Lhokseumawe	11.98	12.32	Increasing
22	Langsa	11.09	11.24	Increasing
23	Banda Aceh	7.41	7.44	Increasing

Source: IDEAS data (2018).

Based on the data of the Institute for Development of the Acehese Society (IDeAS), the poverty rate in 17 out of 23 districts/cities in Aceh is increasing. Aceh Singkil District ranks the poorest in Aceh (22.11 % of the population), followed by Gayo Lues (21.97 %), Pidie Jaya (21.82 %), Pidie (21.43 %), and Bener Meriah (21.14 %) (<http://modusaceh.co/news/kemoverty> in 2018).

This study aims to see the Factors influencing the less optimum management of Aceh special autonomy funds.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Concerning the previously mentioned problems, this study included some literature reviewing the concept of decentralization that has been conducted in several countries to compare whether the system has succeeded or failed in improving the development and

welfare for the people and if the system failed what interventions must be carried out by the central government.

Research conducted by Lambright in Uganda examining the issue of whether the regional government in Uganda can fulfill the responsibilities of decentralization granted by the central government while the region does not have either experience or expertise in running the government administration in the district. Lambright's research concluded that local governments are unable to play their role in designing the development programs and controlling the governance system in the region. Therefore, the central government needs to intervene to maintain the national interest at the regional level. However, the intervention does not eliminate the importance of decentralization as part of the democratization process at the local level (Lambright, 2014).

Besides Lambricht, Hetland also conducted a similar study concerning the decentralization and structure of political organizations at the local level in Mali in 1999. Hetland revealed that the implementation of decentralization in Mali has succeeded in strengthening the local community participation in political decision-making in the region and the decentralization has also supported the democracy to run well. However, based on the social and political relations in society, the decentralization process has also led to regional expansion, the number of new regions is far more compared to the period before the implementation of the decentralization system. The new areas, as a result of the regional expansion, has triggered conflict in the community due to the competition between the local political elite. This condition has concerned the central government as the elite conflict has disrupted the national interests in the region. Due to this conflict circumstances, the central government seeks to prevent the negative impression of the elite competition by recentralizing its power in the region. Also, the central government tries to foster the local elites to be part of its power to protect the interests of the central government locally. This effort then results in the political clientelism in the region (Hetland, 2010).

In Indonesia, some scholars, including MacAndrews, Schiller, and Syarif Hidayat, conducted the study of decentralization. They examined the politics of central power to the region. Their research illustrated that the relations between the center and provinces in Indonesia during the New Order era experienced significant changes instead of the political ideology aspect. This change occurred because the President, Soeharto, prioritized the economic development instead of political development. Therefore, Suharto actively controlled the central and regional government relations by issuing Law number 5 of 1974.

Their study concluded that this practice of power enabled the New Order regime to succeed in conducting national and local development. For example, building schools, road infrastructure, and irrigation in villages through Presidential Instruction (Inpres) and implementing the Provincial Development Programs (PDP). On the other hand, this successful economic development has weakened the implementation of a local democracy because the government prohibited political activities in the community. Through a floating mass political policy, it was forbidden for people to engage in political activities

in the region. Soeharto also limited the number of political parties that were supposed to be the institutions fighting for the people's aspirations. He also employed military and bureaucratic powers to control the community from being involved in practical politics. The dominant role of military both at the national and regional levels allowed the New Order regime to perpetuate its power (MacAndrews, 2010, Syarif Hidayat, 2015, Schiller, 2012).

From several previous studies that have been described above, it is very different from this study, in general these studies describe the implementation of decentralization in several countries, including in Indonesia, especially in the New Order era, whether the implementation of the decentralization system was successfully implemented or that which failed to run. Meanwhile, this study focuses more on the study of the management of the Aceh special autonomy fund which has not yet had an impact on creating welfare for the people of Aceh after the peace of the Helsinki MoU in Aceh. Too much special autonomy funds have been disbursed by the central government for Aceh, but poverty continues to increase in Aceh every year in Aceh.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted in 2018 in Aceh, this study employed a descriptive method with a qualitative approach. This method was considered relevant to studying the optimization management of the Aceh special autonomy funds for the welfare of Acehnese people. By using a qualitative approach, this research was expected to obtain accurate data and information to comply with empirical facts. This study gathered both primary and secondary data. Primary data was in the form of oral or oral words and/or movements or behaviors of reliable subjects, the informants related to the variables being studied. Secondary data was derived from graphic documents (such as note and text messages), photos, films, video annotations, objects, and others that can enrich the primary data.

The informant selection technique in this study was non-probability, meaning that each element or member of the population did not have equal opportunity to be chosen. The non-probability method is divided into purposive and snowball techniques. The purposive technique is a sampling technique with specific considerations (Sugiyono, 2010). This technique is more appropriate for qualitative research or research that does not require to draw generalization. The

snowball technique is a sampling technique enabling more samples. Initially, only one or two samples are involved, but the researchers can select more samples if they consider the initial sample being inadequate to complete the data. The informants in this study were one member of the DPRA, one former regent, two community leaders, and one academic as well as a member of Gerak Aceh.

Data collection involved interviews, observation, and document study. Concerning the document study, data was collected by reading and analyzing documents, archives, and secondary data sources related to the topic being studied. Document study was conducted to support the existing literature as well as to improve analysis.

4. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

4.1. Factors Influencing the Less Optimum Management of Aceh Special Autonomy Funds

4.1.1. Regulatory Problem

The continuous change of the qanun (law or regulation) indicates the regulatory issue of special autonomy funds management. From 2008 to 2018, the Aceh government has released at least three regulations (Aceh Qanun) concerning the management of special autonomy funds. The Qanun regulates the management of Aceh special autonomy funds, including the planning, the implementation as well as the monitoring and evaluation of the usage of the funds.

At the end of 2018, the Aceh government planned to amend the qanun regarding the special autonomy funds management. The amendment aimed to refine some of the articles and verses in Aceh qanun number 10 the Year 2016 to be more precise, clear and relevant to the intention and purpose of special autonomy funds usage by considering the aspects of justice and equity to achieve the harmony and balance of well-targeted regional development in expending the Aceh special autonomy funds (<http://www.ajnn.net/news/dinilai-masih-lemah-dpra-kembali-rubah-qanun-dana-otsus/index.html> on December 10, 2018).

Although the change to the regulation of special autonomy funds management is conducted under the pretext of improving the welfare, it cannot conceal the fact regarding the poor or slow performance of the Aceh government, both executive and legislative, in designing an appropriate special autonomy fund

management model to help prosper the community. The legal regulation that is constantly changing every year results in the special autonomy funds management even more confusing. Also, the primary problem of the change in regulation always concerns the percentage distribution of funds allocation and the division of authority between the provincial and the district/city government.

The central government allocates 40% and of the special autonomy funds for the province while the remaining 60% is for the district/city government. From 2008 to 2018, the most prominent finding is the ineffectiveness in the management of the Aceh special autonomy funds. The finding primarily concerns the poor time planning of the programs, including location and volume. Besides, many programs do not comply with the contract, the payments exceed physical implementation, and many activities are abandoned. The quality of works is also poor that the community can not use many of them. Other findings include inappropriate project locations and the procurement that is not in line with the needs of the local community (Asnawi Bireuen District community leader, interview on October 20, 2018).

4.1.2. The Unclear Authority to Manage the Special Autonomy Funds

The struggle for power or authority between the provincial and the district/city government concerning the management of the Aceh special autonomy fund clearly shows the failure of the Aceh government in interpreting Asymmetric decentralization in Aceh that leads to claims for the management authority and utilization of the special autonomy funds. This factor is due to the fact the Aceh government fails to distribute the power to a lower level, primarily related to the special autonomy funds management which then affects the poor management of the funds in Aceh.

The Provincial government claimed the right to manage special autonomy funds as their right, in line with the Law of the Aceh Government (LoAG) stipulating that special autonomy is granted to the Aceh Government. The Aceh government then use this law as the basis for withdrawing the special autonomy funds management to the province. As stated by Abdurrahman Ahmad, chairman of the special committee on Aceh Qanun related to Oil and Gas and special autonomy in DPRA, that complying with the mandate of the Law of Aceh Government (UUPA), the special autonomy is in the Province. UUPA does not stipulate that the income of districts/cities include the

special autonomy funds. However, the district/city government argues that the special autonomy funds are also the income of the district/city (Interview was conducted on 10 October 2018 in Banda Aceh).

The policy of the Provincial government that unilaterally decides to manage the special autonomy funds centrally contradicts the basis of regional autonomy currently conducted in Indonesia. The district government mainly complains about the provincial government domination in special autonomy funds management, whereas the UUPA states that the provincial government only “administer” instead of “manage” the special autonomy funds. Therefore, the district government argues that the special autonomy funds should be directly transferred to the district/city government account to be autonomously managed by the district/city government. On the other hand, the

provincial government argues that the provincial government must be in charge to handle the special autonomy funds since the special autonomy is granted at the provincial level and thus the provincial government is responsible for the use of the funds. Consequently, the management of the funds must be at the provincial level as it is precarious to fully submit its management at the district/city level while the province must be accountable for its use (Academic Fisip Unsyiah, interview 20 October 2018 in Banda Aceh).

The egotism of the province in managing the funds results in the funds is often not well-targeted. The Central Government provides trillions rupiah of special autonomy funds each year, it is unfortunate if the large funds are inefficient, unproductive, and inappropriately expended. The district/city considers that the special

Table 3: The Percentage of the Poor Population in Aceh by Area from 2015 to 2018

Area/Year	The number of the poor (in thousand)	The percentage of the poor
Urban Area		
March 2015	157.57	11.13
September 2015	155.81	10.92
March 2016	159.50	10.82
September 2016	163.02	10.79
March 2017	17235	11.11
September 2017	166.77	10.42
March 2018	172.09	10.44
Rural Area		
March 2015	694.01	19.44
September 2015	703.60	19.56
March 2016	688.94	19.11
September 2016	678.29	18.80
March 2017	700.26	19.37
September 2017	663.03	18.36
March 2018	667.40	18.49
Urban + Rural Area		
March 2015	851.59	17.08
September 2015	859.41	17.11
March 2016	848.44	16.73
September 2016	841.31	16.43
March 2017	872.61	16.89
September 2017	829.80	15.92
March 2018	839.49	15.97

Source: Susenas 2015-2018.

Table 4: The Percentage of Poverty in Aceh from 2008 to 2018

Year	The poverty rate in Aceh (%)	The poverty rate in Indonesia (%)
2008	23.53 %	15.40 %
2009	21.80 %	14.15 %
2010	20.98 %	13.33 %
2011	19.57 %	12.49 %
2012	18.48 %	11.96 %
2013	17.72 %	11.46 %
2014	16.98 %	10.96 %
2015	17.08 %	11.22 %
2016	16.43 %	10.86 %
2017	16.89 %	10.12%
2018	15.97 %	9.82 %

Source: the analysis results of several sources in 2018.

autonomy funds are “missing” because the results are not well-targeted. The province designs small, less effective, and rather useless programs. Moreover, the projects developed have no significant impact on improving people’s welfare, and the completed programs cannot stimulate Aceh to be independent (Former deputy regent of East Aceh, interview on November 10, 2018).

4.1.3. The Poor Management of the Special Autonomy Funds

The factors related to the regulatory issue and unclear management authority of the special autonomy funds ultimately have implications for the governance of the funds itself. The Aceh special autonomy funds from 2008 to 2018 is recorded at IDR 56.67 trillion. The funds provided it is well managed, will undoubtedly be able to realize the development and enhance the welfare of Aceh people. However, the overall development of Aceh indicates that the optimization management of Aceh special autonomy funds shows an insignificant role in upgrading the welfare of Acehnese. Poverty remains the primary problem in Aceh.

The data in Tables 3 and 4 shows that the number and the percentage of the poor in Aceh are fluctuating from 2008 to 2018. For example, in March 2015, the number of the poor was 851.59 thousand people (17.08 %), and it increased to 859.41 thousand people (17.11 %) in September 2015. Subsequently, in March 2016, it dropped to 848.44 thousand people (16.73 %), and it kept falling in the following period reaching 841.31 thousand people (16.43 % in September 2016).

In March 2017, it was increased to 872.61 thousand people (16.89 percent) while it fell to 829.80 thousand people (15.92 %) in September 2017. The increase again occurred in March 2018, reaching to 839.49 thousand people (15.97 %).

The implications of the poor management of the Aceh special autonomy fund do influence not only the improvement of people’s welfare but also the funds use. Based on the data from the Anti-Corruption Movement (GeRAK) in Aceh, the use of the autonomy funds has remained problematic from 2008 to 2018. In addition to the problematic realization of the special autonomy funds management, it also lacks compliance with laws and regulations, transparency, and accountability in each process of the projects in the field, and for example, as of mid of 2011, they have not been resolved by the Aceh Government. Unsurprisingly, the evaluation results conducted by the Ministry of Home Affairs reported that the Aceh Province has the lowest score for regional autonomy. The Ministry of Home Affairs establishes the ranking based on 173 indicators in the 2009 report on the regional autonomy performance. The indicators include financial performance, public service, transparency, and accountability (Aceh Movement Members, interviewed on September 3, 2018, in Banda Aceh).

The poor management of the special autonomy funds has also lead to many activities being behind schedule, lack of coordination, lack of supervision, and poorly targeted, resulting in the poor quality of work. Therefore, there are many unsatisfactory results, even some projects were abandoned, such as a newly

constructed building without the roof when the deadline was up, and it was not financed in the following year. There was a case in East Aceh where the special autonomy funds were budgeted to build a school, but when the construction was about to start, the location was disputed land. Another example is the construction of a community health center (puskesmas) where the road for transporting the materials was not available, the only access was by boat, and finally, the project was canceled. These examples prove the poor planning and the ignorance of the field (Former Regent of East Aceh, interviewed on 10 November 2018).

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that the Aceh special autonomy funds are granted for 20 years, the allocations are 2% and 1% of the national General Allocation Fund (DAU) the first 15 years and the following five years respectively. This fact indicates that the Aceh government only has the remaining five years to manage a large number of special autonomy funds, while in the next five years the funds received will be decreasing. This reasoning should be a powerful trigger for the Aceh government to establish fixed regulations. The Aceh Government should also prepare a handbook of special autonomy funds management consisting of complete and detailed forms of management and special autonomy for the remaining period with fixed regulatory references.

Regulations or rules concerning the management and use of special autonomy funds are the frameworks for the users and the management of the special autonomy funds itself. The legal certainty of the special autonomy fund management is an absolute matter. Thus, the changes to the qanun concerning the management and utilization of the special autonomy funds continuously occurred in Aceh indicates the failure of the Aceh government in designing an appropriate model of special autonomy funds management to improve the welfare of the people. This failure is due to the struggle of power or authority between the provincial and the district/city government in terms of the management and utilization of the special autonomy funds as well as the overlapping regulations which result in Aceh fails to improve the welfare of people through the concept of asymmetric decentralization granted by the central government.

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