

EDUCATION REFORM TOWARDS A DEMOCRATIC AND DECENTRALIZED INDONESIA: SHIFTING TO BROADBASED AND HIGHBASED EDUCATION STRATEGIES

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1. Indonesia has made commendable progress in education during more than 3 decade of stable and rapid economic growth, although its general achievements are still modest compared to regional norms. A survey by Hong Kong based consultancy group, PERC (Political and Economic Risk Consultancy), placed Indonesia at the lowest end on a rank of 12 Asian countries in quality of the country's workforce. South Korea, Singapore and Japan occupied the 3 top most places. Indonesia's low achievement in education is particularly evident in the low levels of public spending in education, which never exceeds 6-7 percent of the national annual budget.
2. As a new member of the electoral democracies in the world, Indonesia's journey towards stable democratic governance has just begun. The road is bumpy and on the way democracy can be subverted and reversed. Indonesia's infantile democracy needs to be consolidated and strengthened. One of the best and most effective ways to do so is to promote the quality of the most important asset of the country -- the human asset -- through provision of quality education and training for life. Better-educated manpower has the added benefit of sustaining long-term growth, which could eases the pains in the transition to a democratic society.
3. As a nation endowed with great ethnic, cultural and economic diversity, Indonesia needs to foster social policies which balances the imperatives of

decentralization and national integration. In the field of education, an effective framework for education policy within which greater equality of opportunity for good education and training must go hand in hand with decentralization and national integration.

4. Although in primary education, Indonesia's progress has been impressive, a number of national concerns need serious consideration in the formulation of education policies for the future. First, only less than 10 percent of elementary school cohort continues to tertiary education. In the regional context, Indonesia's achievements in manpower quality are still the lowest compared with Asian neighboring countries, as PERC's survey shows. Second, there is great diversity in education achievements and inequality in education qualities between schools, districts and provinces. Third, there is inequality in government supports between state and privately run schools. Fourth, the roles of local governments in education as instrumental mean to improve its human assets are still very limited, and these need enhancing. The best way to respond to these challenges would be increase the responsibility of the society and the local government in the delivery of quality education and training services to the public. *The role of the national government in the decentralized human development effort becomes one of supporting the society and the local government.* This requires the introduction of broadbased education strategies.

5. The main objective of broad-based education policies would be to prepare primary and secondary education graduates and their age-cohort population who are outside of the education system with nationally mandated standards of knowledge as well as adequate practical skills to enter local labor market. To implement the new orientation successfully, the schools need greater freedom in curriculum designing and in the management of training and education activities. As formal school systems have limited capacities to fully

meet the demand of the public for quality education and training, the success of broad-based education needs the full support of community-based education. Such traditional educational and training institutions – the pesantren, on-the-job trainings, internships, and community colleges – have been active for many years and can be made an important instruments for the implementation of broad-based strategy. Fiscal and monetary incentive policies can be used to speed up community and corporate participation in such education and training activities. Through a massive community and local government joint efforts, the problem of low manpower quality could be properly overcome.

6. Other perennial challenges in Indonesia's education are the problem of academic quality. The Third International Mathematics and Science Study – Repeat (TIMSS-R) conducted in 1999 in 38 countries has ranked Indonesian secondary school student's achievement in mathematics at 32 and in science at 34. The study places Singaporean students at the top in mathematics and at second place in science. A survey of the best Asian universities by Asiaweek also places Indonesian universities at the lowest 10 to 20 percents out of 78 Asian higher learning institutions. To overcome these problems the Indonesian government needs to introduce high-based education policies. The major objectives of such policies would be to step up academic quality by the introduction of national academic standards, provides incentive to schools and local governments to meets national academic standards and, to assist community and regional governments in resource mobilization.
7. To properly implement broad-based education and high-based education policies Indonesian Government needs to carry out a total review of its current education policies, and based on this to formulate a new approach for the role of the national government in human asset development for the country. An appropriate education policies have to be implemented to support

the country's journey towards consolidated democracy and workable decentralized governance. International cooperation with friendly countries and multilateral agencies need to be develop to strengthen the institutional capacity of national and regional government to implement these initiatives.

Yogyakarta, November 7, 2001

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