

## **The Eastern Indonesia Knowledge Exchange – a journey of change**

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### **Introduction**

A community development specialist in Papua chatted with a local fisherman who was napping on the beach under a coconut tree.<sup>1</sup> “Pak!”, said the specialist; “Why are you napping here? You are wasting your time!! You should be fishing to increase your income, then you can save money, buy a nice house and sleep well on a comfortable bed!!”<sup>2</sup> Replied the fisherman, “Thank you for your advice - but I was already sleeping well!”

Different and much more complex versions of this simple story are retold by members of ‘underdeveloped’ communities around the world. Faced by well-meaning and seemingly more ‘knowledgeable’ individuals, communities are under pressure to develop without an overall understanding of what development is and where the changes will lead. A common understanding or definition of development is needed which makes immediate sense to both the fisherman and the specialist. Defining ‘development’ within the context of change is discussed in the first section of this paper.

On one hand, development interventions often do not take into account prior development activities or knowledge existing in local communities. On the other hand, many communities targeted for development do not have sufficient access to information on options available to them. How can knowledge be effectively transferred to local communities while taking into account local knowledge and wisdom? This is the challenge in Eastern Indonesia, where communities are faced with external and internal pressures to develop, yet lack access to information, data and knowledge sources. At the same time, local structures, knowledge and practices have for decades been ignored and replaced by centralized systems and structures. The second section of this paper looks at the Eastern Indonesian context and the process or journey of change it is undergoing.

This context is the setting in which the Eastern Indonesia Knowledge Exchange, or in Indonesian, Bursa Pengetahuan Kawasan Timur Indonesia (BaKTI) has been established. This is part of a multidonor support facility for Eastern Indonesia. The final section of this paper focusses on BaKTI and its role in the region’s development or journey of change<sup>3</sup>. BaKTI was not established as a new innovation, but rather as a facility where accumulated experiences and ongoing learning in knowledge management for development (KM4Dev) can be consolidated and applied. BaKTI is thus very much a work in progress, and this paper is provided in the hope that BaKTI can be considered as an ongoing case study and joint facility for KM4Dev practitioners.

## Defining 'development'

The word 'development' (*pembangunan* in Indonesian) is used continuously. Most people, when asked, will say that they want *pembangunan* in Eastern Indonesia. Yet when individuals are asked to define what this means, there is often hesitation while the individual seeks a complex explanation of the word.

WordNet 2.0 by Princeton University (<http://www.wordreference.com/>) states that development is the 'act of improving by expanding or enlarging or refining'. It is difficult to translate, let alone argue the benefits of development based on this definition, especially in many of the local community contexts in Eastern Indonesia.

A village headman, when asked about the condition of *pembangunan* in his village, replied: "It's fine, but we are still short two uniforms". He was referring to the light green uniforms, issued to the village neighbourhood security. To him, this was 'development', being the only tangible change that had affected his village.

In light of such confusion, it is appropriate to try and build a common understanding of what is meant by 'development'. For the purposes of this paper and in describing the Eastern Indonesian context and BaKTI's response, *development* is defined as 'a process of change which is managed to provide benefit for those undergoing this process of change'. Using this definition, one can state that development has occurred if:

1. There is change;
2. The process is efficiently and effectively managed;
3. The beneficiaries of the change process are clear;
4. That the beneficiaries subscribe to the benefits of the process and support the process.

Conversely, there is no development if:

1. There is no change;
2. There has been change, but with no benefit for those undergoing the process of change;
3. The beneficiaries of the process are not clear;
4. The beneficiaries do not subscribe or support the process.

Proponents of development should first clarify whether those affected by the change brought about through a development program actually (1) want this change, (2) recognize the benefits the process of change will provide, and; (3) will ultimately enjoy or utilise these benefits. The need to define development in such a manner can be further clarified within the context of Eastern Indonesia.

## Eastern Indonesia: the context

Eastern Indonesia (EI) is a region covering almost 800.000 km<sup>2</sup>, which is over 40% of Indonesia's total land mass. The area is spread out over four main island groups (Nusa Tenggara, Sulawesi, Maluku and Papua) and contains less than 15% of Indonesia's population (Indonesia's total population is over 242 million according to CIA's Factbook July estimate). Eastern Indonesia has diverse climate conditions ranging from tropical to

alpine (snow covered peaks in Papua). Existing rainforests and eco-systems are sufficiently large to influence the world's environment. The region is immensely rich with natural resources, ranging from mineral resources such as gold and copper (Freeport McMoran), gas (BP Tangguh gas field is one of the world's largest LNG deposits) to marine and forestry resources.

Each of the island groups in Eastern Indonesia has distinctive and diverse indigenous cultures, climates and development conditions. Papua, which is the Indonesian portion of the island of New Guinea, is an extreme example with over 250 languages.

Eastern Indonesia is not a new target of international and national development initiatives; however, many of these projects or programs do not take into account prior development activities. For instance, a 1968 document by UNDP entitled *A design for development in West Irian* (United Nations, New York, 1968) provided many concrete examples of development priorities and approaches for Papua; yet even today, many of the development programs currently under implementation in the region are still trying to address the same issues in health, education and other sectors. Much time and effort as well as costs could be saved by referring to previous project designs and implementation reports. Even so, many local government units do not perceive the value in maintaining or referring to such documents. During a recent joint institutional capacity review of a BAPPEDA, the provincial development planning board in Eastern Indonesia<sup>4</sup>, staff members were asked where documents from past projects were kept. The answer: documents were either tied in bundles and stored in a shed, or were burnt to make space for new project documents.

The approach to development in Eastern Indonesia has been top-down with limited options for participative planning processes. Since the 1960s through to 1997, Indonesia was governed through a very strong centralised system. This has meant that almost all development programs were designed centrally with a tendency to seek 'one-size-fits-all' approaches rather than dealing with the complexities of over 13,000 islands which comprise this archipelago<sup>5</sup>. Over the past 35 years under a centralised government system, there were many examples of projects which failed, as they were unable to deal with the specific conditions and issues faced in local communities. Also, there is limited recognition given to the fact that communities have been able to survive for centuries, often in extreme conditions, and in doing so have developed knowledge and skills which are still applicable today. The Marind tribe for instance, have had new technologies and skills imposed on them to cultivate rice<sup>6</sup>. Their traditional land, consisting mainly of swamps and mangrove forests, was drained to make way for paddy fields as part of a campaign to make Indonesia self-sufficient in rice. Sadly, the land is now under threat of seawater intrusion. Yet traditionally the Marind produced record size tuber plants (sweet potatoes, etc.) in their swamp land, by practicing a method of hydroponics, where seedlings are placed in hollow logs and provided sufficient nutrients in the form of humus and soil, to grow (without further attention) to immense sizes within a few months, ready for harvest.

A more positive development is an increasing number of programs in the region that are oriented towards Knowledge Management (KM) and Knowledge Sharing (KS). One such example is the program of the Gita Kasih Foundation, working in remote areas of West

Timor where there recently have been many reported cases of malnutrition<sup>7</sup>. Their proposal was successful in the recent Indonesia Development Marketplace ‘competition’, which proposed the reintroduction of awareness to communities in remote regions of West Timor on the availability and nutritious value of plants growing wild in the forests. The term ‘reintroduction’ is used, because these plants traditionally were harvested by communities; however, with the introduction of rice, dietary habits of communities shifted, and customary practices were lost. Gita Kasih’s emphasis on the value of traditional forest based crops also simultaneously supports reforestation, another issue in this region. This is a living form of knowledge sharing – where Gita Kasih develops plots of land with examples of plants with their different nutritious benefits for local communities to observe, cultivate and harvest.

Another example has been the drafting of long-term development plans, which previously was a government exercise with limited or no input from civil society. BaKTI provided the facilities for the South Sulawesi Provincial Development Planning Board to socialise the general structure of its long term (25 years) and medium term (5 years) development plan, with prominent experts in the province providing their input per sector. The discussions were broadcast live in South Sulawesi, where listeners could provide their input and responses by telephone or text message. Although one can question the effectiveness of this approach in reaching all segments of South Sulawesi society, it was a big step for provincial governments to seek broader input from its citizens. Important also is that for many listeners, this was the first time they had heard of the provincial government’s medium and long term development approach, and their appreciation of not only learning about such plans but of having the opportunity to respond and provide input was reflected in the number of responses, calls and text messages received.

Since Eastern Indonesia is not a new target for development projects from international agencies, there is already much knowledge and lessons learnt from activities deployed in the region. However, donor agency project documents have been difficult to obtain after a project closes, since most of the documents have been archived outside of the region. The limited access to such documentation especially for local government and NGOs means that approaches and methodologies are continually being reinvented. Moreover, most ‘knowledge centers’ in the region such as university research centers and NGOs, whilst present in each province, have at best limited connectivity to the Internet, and even within the institution, data and information stored cannot be easily accessed or shared. This ongoing lack of access to data and information has also brought about a ‘knowledge fortress’ mentality in many of institutions, which guard their references, data and information from outsiders, even when these knowledge assets are not utilised within the institution<sup>8</sup>.

Despite the knowledge fortress mentality in some institutions, there exist many local organisations and individuals in Eastern Indonesia who are open and willing to share their experiences and knowledge, but who lack the capacity to do so. This is due to a number of reasons, including the relatively high cost of ICT, lack of human resources to record experiences, and remoteness of the region where the work is conducted. Many of these organisations and individuals are better able to verbally describe their work; however, opportunities for interaction and knowledge exchange have been limited. In a capacity self-assessment program conducted in South Sulawesi supported by SOfEI<sup>9</sup>, the most common weakness in all of the 47 participating NGOs was their ‘*Informasi-Dokumentasi*’

capacity: their ability to document their programs and activities and in managing the information. The influence and role of strong central NGOs dealing with donor agencies has decreased the need for field-based NGOs to build overall documentation capacity

The limited access to information and lack of willingness or ability to share available information and data, combined with the limited infrastructure and facilities to store, manage, exchange and analyse information and data, have created the general impression from outside of the region that there is limited capacity within the region. This is especially the case when local knowledge, practices and customs are not available in writing, and when consultants or other development specialists are unable to incorporate or even consider local practices and customs. Fortunately the existing wealth of knowledge is gradually becoming available from local sources and donors are also becoming better at and more open in sharing their experiences.

## **Journey of Change**

To effectively implement development programs based on the definition of development as a process of change, one must comprehend the status of targeted communities or regions in this change process. Some communities have already undergone many changes, such as newly constructed facilities and infrastructure, and changes brought about through education. Such communities are able to assimilate more information and data and apply this knowledge in their work. Other communities have undergone limited changes, and have not had much access to external information and data. Still other communities may have experienced change, but have not benefited from the changes around them, such as the Marind tribe mentioned previously. Some communities have the support of NGOs and research centers, while many do not. This condition is reflected in the Kecamatan Development Program (KDP) of the Government of Indonesia, funded by the World Bank. This is a huge community-driven development (CDD) program covering over 30,000 villages throughout the country. Although the program is often cited for its phenomenal success in providing communities with the power to determine their priorities, performance levels vary greatly between communities who have access to information and infrastructure and communities who have largely been untouched by government programs. Many of the latter are in areas of Eastern Indonesia, such as Maluku and Papua. On a national level, the seemingly slow progress of such communities becomes an issue, as it affects disbursement of funds and ties up human resources having to focus on 'non-performing' areas. Yet, by understanding the change processes occurring within these areas, the benefits in strengthening and empowering communities in these areas may actually be immense.

Compilation of development profiles of each community or region can provide clarity on their status in terms of development. By consolidating community or regional profiles, one can see the extent to which different communities have developed or changed, and their current status. The different levels of change can provide a benchmark for future processes in each region and community.

The community or regional profiles then depict the entry point and current achievements of each community or region on a 'path' of development, leading to the level of change that the community or region ultimately seeks to attain. This allows policy makers and

planners to design and measure the appropriateness of programs and projects to the needs of the particular community or region. Such profiles will also assist in clarifying the position of community members when expressing their priorities and needs. These profiles could be further developed to become knowledge management (KM) and knowledge exchange (KE) indexes (rather than human development indexes) to support the development needs of each area.

As an example, a community development consultant may be tasked by an international development organisation to work with a coastal community to find out what their development priorities are (without giving the community too high expectations, as funds need to be processed and other institutional barriers need to be faced). The assignment is to be completed within a three-month timeframe, and consists of a certain number of focus group discussions within the community. The task is simple enough, with seemingly ample time. Yet the consultant will find that the community members will be away for certain periods of the month to catch fish and prawns. Then their catch needs to be sold, and money spent. This will usually leave a very tight window within each calendar month for the consultant to be able to conduct his/her consultations. The contracting organisation does not understand why the local community does not want to spend more time with the consultant, especially since the programme is for the benefit of the local community. The consultant is unaware that from prior experience, the local community is used to being assessed and to promises being made that are not kept, and so is unwilling to spend too much time in discussions which might not provide concrete results. The consultant is left with limited options, and may choose to undertake the consultation with whoever is available, no matter how unrepresentative.

Taking the above example further, suppose the consultant eventually finishes the assignment and submits the assessment conclusions with fairly representative input from community members. The development organisation, upon receiving the list of priorities, queries why small business and not health was seen as a priority, although the local statistics show that maternal and early childhood mortality rates are four times above the national average. Yet the community itself does not see this as an issue, as they have always experienced such high mortality rates and accept this as part of life. The development organisation then decides to be more decisive and builds a health post in the village. Initially, with funding support, the health post runs well, but once the program ends, the staff leave, and the building is not maintained. Essentially, no change or 'development' has occurred in this example. When asked about the health post, community members will admit that it was good when it was operational, but now that they have to pay for service and medication, they are unable to afford the costs. Some may argue that they never asked for the facility in the first place.

The above is a simple example, but is useful in describing how maintaining profiles of a region or communities could help the consultant and the funding organisation with information on numerous issues:

1. The availability of cultural practices, and how these can be used to bring the community together to discuss pertinent development issues;
2. The openness and willingness of the community towards external assistance/support, based on previous project experiences;

3. The key decision makers within the community who need to be considered for support, including knowledge of their opinions run vis a vis the general communities wishes;
4. Prior experiences which have left a positive or negative impact on the community, in order to determine alignment with or avoidance of previous approaches;
5. The community's level of exposure to technology and access to information, determining their awareness of options available to them (i.e. microhydro electricity rather than fuel based power generators), and
6. Applicable indigenous knowledge, (i.e. agricultural practices, traditional medicines, etc.).

Many development organisations commence work in any given area with an assessment of the targeted community or regions, however this assessment is usually utilised only for the purpose of the program. Therefore, many communities suffer from 'assessment fatigue', brought about by continuous assessments from different agencies and project teams.

Avoidance of assessment fatigue gives rise to the need for an organisation which focuses on maintaining regional profiles in the form of KM and KE indices and tracking changes brought about by development initiatives. Such a unit focusing on knowledge management and exchange allows for Eastern Indonesia's development to be mapped and the direction for 'journeys of change' for regions and communities to be appropriately charted/designed.

## **BaKTI's Role**

BaKTI was originally conceived within the proposal for the multidonor Support Office for Eastern Indonesia (SOEI), as a knowledge bank and public information resource of SOEI. The need for this resource was based on the general assumption that although donor agencies, NGOs and other development players have implemented numerous programs within the region, the knowledge gained through individual programs has not been systematically captured and maintained for future access. Thus, new programs are continually being reinvented and lessons learnt have been lost. The word 'bakti' itself originates from Sanskrit, and loosely means 'serve' or 'commitment'. This was seen as an appropriate acronym for such a facility committed to serving the development knowledge needs of the region.

The original idea of a knowledge bank then developed further to the concept of a knowledge exchange. Apart from storing donor project knowledge and lessons learnt, the facility would also profile knowledge assets from the region, i.e. case studies, best practices and lessons learnt from NGOs, CBOs and local government bodies. In this way, agents of change and development, both local and international, can learn from each other. Instead of seeking to develop new innovations, BaKTI's development commenced with reference studies on past and ongoing KM and KE experiences. A number of key references are included in the bibliography.

Profiling of knowledge resources to challenge the general assumption that there is no, or limited, capacity in Eastern Indonesia was also seen to be important. Sharing and exchanging knowledge from the region would increase awareness of local capacity and

could lead to more and better interaction and collaboration between stakeholders in Eastern Indonesia and national and international aid agencies.

Launched in September 2004, BaKTI's mission is 'to become a hub of constructive interaction between civil society organisations (CSOs), government and donors through the access and exchange of knowledge for sustainable development in Eastern Indonesia'. This mission statement is also based on the Eastern Indonesian context where there has been limited interaction between local, national and international stakeholders. BaKTI's approach to improve development processes in the region is to ensure that development interventions are designed based on constructive interaction between stakeholders. However, in order to ensure that interaction is constructive, both sides need to comprehend the perspective of the other.

To support development stakeholders *internal* to Eastern Indonesian, BaKTI's focus is to provide access to references that can broaden the knowledge base of Eastern Indonesians regarding international and national smart practices, theories, approaches and methodologies. BaKTI also provides access to strategic plans and priorities of international agencies.

To support development stakeholders *external* to the region, BaKTI collects and provides access to data and information on what changes have occurred in targeted communities and regions, and whether changes brought about by past and current programs and conditions have provided sufficient benefits. This includes:

1. The current status of development/underdevelopment in targeted regions for development interventions in Eastern Indonesia;
2. Changes taking place in different areas of Eastern Indonesia, and which of these have provided benefit to stakeholders;
3. Current knowledge management conditions in each area (existence of knowledge resource centers, libraries, local NGOs, access to information, internet, etc.) that can be supported/developed to ensure that Eastern Indonesians are aware of changes and contribute to the process, but also enabling them to determine the processes seen to be most appropriate to their conditions and environment.

These three points can be considered to be the key knowledge components required to track development in Eastern Indonesia. By maintaining such information and data, and tracking its utilisation, it will be possible to see whether BaKTI's existence and role has made a difference in the development of the region.

In terms of knowledge management for development, BaKTI provides an open opportunity for KM practitioners to utilise and participate in local knowledge. BaKTI's programs include internships and institutional linkages.

### **BaKTI's Current Activities**

The BaKTI team is currently focussed on:

- Establishing a repository archive of development knowledge for donors, government and civil society organisations focusing on the development of Eastern Indonesia;
- Publishing and disseminating information relevant to development practitioners in Eastern Indonesia;

- Providing meeting facilities and organising events to support interaction between and among civil society organisations, donor bodies and government agencies;
- Establishing Communities of Practice or groups of people who hold similar interests and face common problems in Eastern Indonesia allowing them to share information, contacts, views and solutions.

### **Management of BaKTI**

BaKTI's strategic direction is determined by BaKTI's seven-member Board of Advisors. The Board meets three times a year. Day-to-day management is the responsibility of the BaKTI Coordinator. BaKTI is funded by the British Department for International Development, the Government of the Netherlands, it is supported by the Australian Agency for International Development and administered by the World Bank.

### **BaKTI Facilities, Products and Services**

*BaKTI Library and Database:* BaKTI's facilities are located in Makassar, South Sulawesi. Contained within this facility is a public library with ten workstations offering free access to the Internet and BaKTI's electronic document database. In addition, wireless connections are available. In December 2005, the BaKTI Database will be launched online at [www.bakti.org](http://www.bakti.org). The library and database also provide opportunities for interns to develop information and data management skills.

*BaKTI News:* Many development stakeholders in Eastern Indonesia do not have Internet access. To reach them, BaKTI distributes a newsletter that profiles local organisations and publicises development programs and experiences. Readers are informed of new documents and data available in BaKTI, which can be requested by mail, fax or SMS. The newsletter also serves to initiate communication between local and international institutions, for instance in proposing new initiatives and soliciting support from others with similar requirements.

*Other BaKTI Publications:* In addition to BaKTI News, BaKTI will launch three other series between November 2005 and February 2006:

- *Lessons from Eastern Indonesia* promotes smart practices, case studies and shares experiences of what works in the region in an accessible format;
- *Eastern Indonesia Area Briefings* are collections of basic data for Eastern Indonesia. Initially there will be one issue for each region: Nusa Tenggara, Sulawesi, Maluku and Papua, and this will be expanded to one issue per province.
- *Eastern Indonesia Bibliographies* are simple lists of books and research papers available at BaKTI and are designed as a starting point for research on specific topics.

*BaKTI Events:* In collaboration with other institutions and organizations, BaKTI supports public events in Makassar and elsewhere in Eastern Indonesia to support knowledge sharing and exchange. Events include discussions, seminars, film reviews, book reviews, culture promotion and workshops. A regional forum is also held annually providing opportunities for development practitioners from government, private sector, NGOs, woman activists, academicians, religious and traditional leaders from all of the provinces in Eastern Indonesia to meet, share experiences and determine development priorities for the region.

*BaKTI Office and Meeting Facilities:* BaKTI provides four separate meeting and office spaces free of charge, provided they are available and their utilisation is development-related.

*BaKTI Café:* In collaboration with the South Sulawesi Chapter of the Indonesian Association of Hotels and Restaurants, BaKTI's small café serves as an informal location for people to meet or read, and provides an opportunity for Makassar-based hospitality students to develop their skills.

*BaKTI Forums and Communities of Practice:* BaKTI encourages the development of sector and regional forums for Eastern Indonesia, both physical and virtual, through facilitating interaction, including between local and international forums.

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## Abstract

Eastern Indonesia is a region of over 40% of Indonesia's land mass, but comprises only 15% of Indonesia's population. The area includes 12 provinces, with distinctive and diverse indigenous cultures, climates and development conditions.

The Eastern Indonesia Knowledge Exchange (often referred to by its Indonesian acronym, BaKTI), was established with donor support to become a hub of constructive interaction between CSO, government and donors through the access and exchange of knowledge for sustainable development in Eastern Indonesia. To ensure that BaKTI's development strategy is aligned to this purpose within the broader context of Eastern Indonesia's development, the question is: what is BaKTI's approach to improve development processes in the region?

This paper seeks to outline this approach, starting with a simple definition of development within a context of change, where development is: a process of change that is managed to provide benefit for those undergoing this process of change. From this definition, the paper will then proceed to outline Eastern Indonesia's process of development as a 'Journey of Change' and the role of knowledge in this journey.

## About the author



Petrarca Karetji was born and raised in the remote highlands of Papua. He studied English Language Education at Satya Wacana Christian University, Central Java, Indonesia, where he commenced his career as a project officer (1992). Since 1994, Petra worked in a number of development project management consultancy firms, implementing HRD projects including scholarships (AusAID), fellowships (ADB) and training programs (WB), nationally and internationally. Before joining the World Bank as a consultant assigned to SOFEl, Petra managed a small consultancy firm (1995 - May 2004) focusing on regional

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Original story retold by Mr. Musa Sombuk, MA – Social Scientist of Papua State University. Papua: Republic of Indonesia portion of the island of New Guinea

<sup>2</sup> Pak: polite Indonesian salutation for men, means ‘sir’ or ‘mister’

<sup>3</sup> Phrase originally used by Prof. Willi Toisuta, PhD in discussions on the strategic development of BaKTI

<sup>4</sup> Conducted in September 2005, the writer was part of a small team which included personnel from UNDP, UNICEF and WorldBank

<sup>5</sup> Approx. 6,000 are inhabited

<sup>6</sup> An indigenous tribe living in the Merauke District, Papua Province. Refer also to ‘Papua, the land of lessons unlearned’ *Survey Report – SOfEI* (March 2004)

<sup>7</sup> Article published in the June-July 2005 edition of BaKTI News (<http://www.bakti.org.baktinews.htm>)

<sup>8</sup> *Knowledge Sharing in Development Agencies: Knowledge Fortress or Knowledge Pool?* Geoff Barnard, Paper prepared for the EADI/IMWG Conference, Dublin, September 2003, <http://www.km4dev.org/index.php/articles/downloads/323>

<sup>9</sup> SOfEI – Multidonor - Support Office for Eastern Indonesia, being the host unit under which BaKTI was established