

**Policy Dialogue on
“Empowering Women in Autonomy and
Decentralization Processes”**

**The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Indonesia
in New York, May 29, 2003**

Policy Directions

1. The granting of autonomy should be preceded by a careful identification of the goals to be achieved by such a mechanism;
2. The presence of sufficiently strong willingness to live together-combined with an understanding of what autonomy can and cannot accomplish -is essential to successful autonomy of a region;
3. Autonomy and decentralization should aim to make local governments more responsive to the needs of local people;
4. Effective autonomy and decentralization require the establishment of locally elected councils, local appointments of chief local officers, locally approved budgets, transparent grant systems and clear expenditure assignments, as well as increased capacity of local governments to collect taxes, deliver services, and keep adequate books;
5. Autonomy as a positive step towards democratization and decentralized governance should be consolidated by the central government which should ensure that provinces devote resources to cross-cutting concerns such as gender equality, equity, the upholding of human rights, promotion of good governance, and preservation of the environment;
6. Decentralization should be viewed as a system, and all of the pieces should fit together. There must be a strong central government ability to monitor and to evaluate it;
7. Decentralization processes, as part of strategies for effective

governance, should aim to ensure greater transparency, accountability, consultation, and participation in decision-making at local levels;

8. Autonomy and decentralization processes must be accompanied by complementary efforts to promote democracy;
9. Autonomy and decentralization cannot be promoted without encouragement for the rise of civic society;
10. Sufficient knowledge of the social realities of the different groups involved in autonomy and decentralization processes is essential in managing competing needs and demands of different groups in society;
11. Not all decision makings should be decentralized, in order that resource distribution can redress regional inequalities;
12. Good processes of autonomy and decentralization require the support of central government, especially in the area of women's empowerment;
13. Central government should continue to play an active role in facilitating the necessary institutional supports for successful autonomy and decentralization by: supplying technical services for building local capacity; promoting the mobilization of local people's participation in local development; and neutralizing the skewed distribution of power arising from local oligarchs;
14. Central government should be pro-active in helping to set quality standards, auditing and evaluation, and in providing supra-local support to local financial structures; central government should also be responsible for coordination efforts across regions and for investing in large infrastructures;
15. The establishment of local accountability through effective checks-and-balances, including the use of local information, and ensuring that local elites do not hold all offices is vital to the success of autonomy and decentralization;
16. The establishment of local accountability should be

complemented by institutional reform efforts and building effective democratic systems through, *inter alia*, education;

17. Accountability of local government officials requires significant local revenue power, in addition to significant local expenditure power;
18. Enhancing education of local people should include not only general education but also civic education so that they acquire knowledge and the skills to understand, explain, compare, monitor, and evaluate principles and practices of public policies and citizenship;
19. Efforts to promote business and production activities at provincial and local levels are required to improve social service delivery in decentralization processes;
20. One way to enhance business and production activities is to alter the structure of incentives such that provincial and local officials are able to reap benefits from programs they themselves design instead of as gifts offered by local elites;
21. Women's education is essential to lowering national infant mortality rate (IMR) and to the demographic transition and health conditions of children. Improving maternal and child health is to raising a society's living standards, and providing favorable conditions for a more effective democratic system and decentralization;
22. Enhancing women's participation in autonomy and decentralization processes should encompass the complex relationship between power, poverty and participation and should be at the core of promoting good governance;
23. Empowerment should go beyond facilitating an increase in women's participation, and it should include processes that lead women to perceive themselves as having rights and entitlements and to be able to voice their demands, as well as provide improved access to decision-making opportunities. Government efforts to empower women should also lead to concrete actions to bring about changes in laws, in access to resources, and in public and private institutions that reinforce women's subordination;

24. A large measure of support for women from government and society at large, should be ensured when they first take up office in the provinces and decentralized level. This may help prevent marginalization of women by factors like isolation, unequal treatment, conflict between domestic obligations and public duties;
25. Women's participation at local levels can be encouraged by including various capacity development and affirmative action programmes in government;
26. In order to ensure mutual reinforcement between women's empowerment and autonomy and decentralization processes, a host of factors should be taken into account, including community characteristics, local culture and institutions, the type of decentralization and the mechanisms of empowerment utilized (related to information, dissemination, citizen participation, group information, and accountability);
27. Strategies for enhancing women's participation in autonomy and decentralization processes include: quota laws or systems at provincial and local levels, initiatives to integrate women's leadership and a gender focus into broader efforts in good governance and citizen participation; strengthening and decentralizing national women's offices and bureaus; pilot projects and studies to promote women's leadership and participation in municipal planning; gender budget initiatives; and promotion of income-generating opportunities and micro-enterprises for women;
28. Compulsory quota systems may be useful, particularly when politics at local level are more conservative and less supportive of women's participation;
29. Socially conservative rural or provincial values may result in decentralized resources and responsibilities revitalizing patriarchal values (for example, via customary practices);
30. Relative isolation of provincial and local levels from international trend and thinking may impede the improvement of human resources via decentralization;

31. Decentralization can only strengthen women's constituency if there is an explicit focus on empowerment strategies. These strategies should include dissemination of information to all groups in society; consultation with all stakeholders; development of participatory approaches; and supporting the development of a vibrant, well-organized civil society at the local level;
32. Women's empowerment is particularly important in the context process of local budgeting. This empowerment will equip women with "budget literacy," which is basic understanding of what a budget is, how it is developed, what limits there are on the power of elected officials, and what rights citizens have in relation to resource allocations and budget processes;
33. Considering the fact that women may have traditionally been excluded from decision-making processes and thus not understand the processes and rules of engagement, specific strategies should be devised. These strategies may include, among others, extra training for women and support to the establishment of networks of women in similar situations; efforts to create positive environments; and advocacy in support of women's involvement among local leaders;
34. Since women are not a homogenous group, empowering women in autonomy and decentralization processes should promote a broad consultation process so that their needs and priorities are known;
35. Increasing number of women in decision-making bodies will not be enough. Gender analysis and perspectives, which focus on roles and responsibilities as well as rights, relations and power, should be utilized more broadly in autonomy and decentralization planning and implementation processes in projects on the ground;
36. Autonomy and decentralization processes can indeed empower women but only if empowerment is an explicit goal and well-defined strategies, adequate resource and commitment at top levels are in place. Specific support mechanisms should be devised in order to allow women to play an effective role in

political decision-making processes;

37. Merely decentralizing decision-making without addressing the root causes of marginalization and inequality can be limiting women's participation and exposing women to backlash;
38. Capacity-building efforts at provincial and local levels should be promoted so that administrative structures at provincial and local levels are capable of incorporating gender mainstreaming projects and conducting gender impact assessments on legislative initiatives.

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