Questioning the Decentralization System in Managing Public Sector Integrity in Indonesia

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Abstract—Decentralization in Indonesia has brought enormous opportunities for this country’s further social and economic development. Local governments as well as local house of representatives were no longer dominated by political elites coming from political parties. New leaders arise from outside political parties, bringing hope for change. Recent development however, does not show satisfactory results. The Corruption Eradication Commission caught several local governments’ leaders for corruption cases. Preconditions required for successful decentralization have not been fulfilled. This bring questions on where this decentralization system is going and whether this system would be able to manage integrity in public sectors.

Keywords—decentralization, integrity, political party.

I. BACKGROUND

Trust is an essential element for public sector integrity. Public trust towards government shall grow when public services which are delivered by government runs well, responsive and accountable. As tax payers, citizens demand good quality public services and actualization of democratic government: a government established from the people, by the people, and for the people. Without trust there will be no participation and without participation, public sector integrity will be far to reach. An interesting fact on citizens’ trust toward government was revealed by Transparency International through their Twitter status in 29 June 2018 at 2:00 AM. According to their poll in Facebook, 82.5% of their followers do not trust their government.²

In the case of Indonesia, trust is also an important issue. Looking back two decades in the past, public distrust to the government was roots of problem that drove reformation movement in 1998. Students’ and people’s demand for reformation, accompanied political and economic crisis, as well as the threat of disintegration of the Republic Indonesia forced President Soeharto to step down from presidency, just one year after he was reelected by the People General Assembly. Following this national succession, in the same year a general election for president and the decentralization law was prepared, to be operated just on the next year. Decentralization, which in Indonesia are commonly recognized as regional autonomy, was taken to answer the regional demand for a wider authority and prevent national disintegration. Decentralization was expected to provide a foundation for economic and political stability, democratization, good governance, social and economic improvement, and more importantly, is to sustain the existence of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia.

II. THE ERA BEFORE DECENTRALIZATION

Political and governance system in Indonesia before decentralization implemented in 1999 was heavily centralistic and highly controlled by central government. Almost every strategic public policy was made under a very tight chain of command. Central government dominate the process of policy making, and local governments have only an authority to obey and execute policies. Persons taking in charge for local governments at provincial level (governors), head of regencies and mayors, along with the member of local house of representatives were decided and appointed by the central government. State’s control over political entity also reach the formation of leaders of political party (Harris, 1997). Before decentralization, even the results of general election, was fully under state’s control in order to win Golkar Party, the government supported political party during that era.

A highly centralistic governance system created two sides. The positive side during that time was the establishment of political stability, as a result of strong state’s interventions in every aspect of citizen’s social and political activity. Indonesia’s political stability enables flows of investment and drove a rapid development, which were needed during that time. Such a very strong centralistic power, however brings negative side. State’s bargaining...
power toward the people was overly dominant, which make government officials’ easily abuse their power. This reflects Lord Acton’s famous remark that “power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupt absolutely”.

In some cases, for the sake of development there was a conspiracy between government and investors that compromise the rights of people. There was almost no room for the people to criticize and control the government. Critical press during that time should bear the risk of being banned by the government. In 1994, three newspapers were banned by the government for their critical and investigative news, they are Tempo Magazine, Editor dan Tabloid Detik.3

Check and balances mechanism were not able to be conducted by the member of house representative at central and local level. This is the consequences of states’ control over political party in Indonesia during that time. Leaders and committee of political party was determined by the government. The attack of PDI Party office in 27 Juli 1996 was an example showing state’s intervention to political party. The military were suspected to be deeply involved in the attack.4

Similar condition also occurs to local government, from the head of local governments until street level bureaucracy. They worked under a very tight control of central government. Even the choosing of head of agencies were decided by the central government. This monopolistic system prevents the implementation of integrity values, because they are more afraid to their superior and the central government than serving the interest of people. Under such system then transparency, accountability and integrity as the founding principles of public administration (Armstrong, 2005) could not be established.

III. THEORIES OF DECENTRALIZATION

Decentralization has many definitions and means different thing to different people (Devas, 1997). However, there is a consensus that decentralization is about transfer of authority and money from national to sub national level. Rondinelli (in Tambulasi & Kayuni, 2007) explains that decentralization includes the transfer the responsibility starting from planning stage, execution, and accumulation of financial resource, flowing from national into lower level. Decentralization basically is an instrument to manage policy governance with bigger authorities distributed to local governments in order to make governance and development becomes more effective and efficient (Kumolo, et. al., 2017).

Studies on decentralization shows that decentralization is essential to implement good governance principles (Green, 2005; Bevir, 2009). According to Rondinelli’s framework (Schneider, 2003) decentralization consists of three important dimensions, they are administrative, political, and fiscal. Furthermore, decentralization also associated with the process of democratization and empowerment in developing countries (Bardhan & Mokherjee, 2006). Crook (2003) explains that decentralization plays important role as an instrument to build trust between central and local government, increases government’s accountability, efficiency, and make government becomes closer to the people. Decentralization may also used to promote a more efficient and democratic politics (Bevir, 2009). Political decentralization for instance, may strengthen accountability between electorate and local politicians (downward) and between democratically elected politicians and local civil servants (horizontal).

Decentralization, however, is not an autopilot mechanism. Some preconditions are required to ensure decentralization operating successfully. World Bank acknowledged five conditions that should be met in order for decentralization to work successfully which are ensuring that local financial resources match the ability to provide local public services, the local community should be aware of the cost of services, community should be able to express their desires in a meaningful way, there should be transparency and accountability of local government activities and the legal and institutional system should match the political objectives (Green, 2005). Bevir (2009) explains three important preconditions for decentralization to work effectively in promoting good governance. They are the functioning of local democracy which will make local government legitimate, fiscal autonomy that meet local needs and competent local governments’ officials. More importantly, capacity building should be improved at local level, in order for them to be able to formulate and implement policies correctly (Keban, 1999). Those explanations show that implementation decentralization requires a comprehensive planning and should be performed systematically through stages.

IV. INDONESIA UNDER DECENTRALIZATION

Indonesia unfortunately did not have such a privilege for a well-planned decentralization. The reformation of governance system, from highly centralistic toward decentralization was not planned to be implemented. The dramatic change in such a very limited time in implementing decentralization was merely an instrument to answer for students and people’s movement and restore order. During the transition period from 1998 to 1999, there was a dangerous moment when some political elites suggest the creation of federal state of Indonesia, an agenda that was never part of students’s reformation movement. The essential mission of reformation movement during that time was democratization in Indonesia. They felt that highly centralistic system that already lasts for decades was a main barrier for democracy and public sector integrity. Such system makes government officials prefer to serve their leader than serving the people, they tend to corrupt.

Through decentralization, the chain of command was shortened, no longer dominated by the central government. During the first phase of decentralization, an enabling and empowering environment for local government was provided. It was a kind of privilege and huge amount of power that local governments and member of house of representatives never think of before and ready to manage. Since then, local government have power and authority to manage their local resources. Rights for indigenous people were also acknowledge. For the first time they are given a political channel to express their aspirations trough their
senators, a non-political party member, chosen by indigenous people to represent their political rights in Indonesia’s House of Representatives. It was the first time implemented in Indonesia’s general election system. A decentralized decision making is expected to bring people closer to government, motivate people’s participation and brings good governance and clean government to the agenda. Governments’ policy and works become more accountable and design as well executed to fulfill people’s needs. Good governance shall become a leverage effect in developing Indonesia’s social and economic foundation.

A little look back to the past, decentralization in Indonesia was introduced since the colonization era of the Netherlands and Japan. The goals of decentralization during colonization was just a division of power between colonial authority and local authority which mainly only to serve the interests of the colonial authority. Later in the era of independence, decentralization was introduced to consolidate the layers of government, therefore the power which was authorized to local government were limited.

There are several regulations packages which were published as a framework for decentralization after reformation movement in 1998. The first package was Law Number 22 Year 1999 on regional autonomy dan Law Number 25 Year 1999 on Financial Balance Between Center and Local Government. The first one was designed to manage political decentralization and the second one to manage fiscal decentralization. This experiment of democracy in Indonesia was not able to satisfied and answer the needs and demands of the people. Five years later, in 2004, Law Number 22 Year 1999 on regional autonomy was changed by Law Number 32 Year 2004 Fiscal Balance Between Central and Local Government. Still working under trial and error method and based on several evaluations, a decade later Law Number 32 Year 2004 was changed by Law Number 23 Year 2014 on Regional Autonomy. Until now, some articles within this law were already improved, while Law Number 33 Year 2004 on Fiscal Balance Between Central and Local Government remains the same. Those laws were also followed by the law concerning general election which manage the election of member of Indonesia’s House of Representatives, senator, member of local House of Representatives, presidential election, and head of local government at provincial level, regency and city level. These laws of general election have been changed for several time and these laws have become the instrument of direct election system in Indonesia.

Decentralization occurring since 1999 until present day in Indonesia can be considered as a revolutionary one. This is because through decentralization citizens have their rights to directly vote their member of house of representatives at local and center level, their senator to represent their indigenous rights, vote for the governor, vote for the head of regency or mayor, and also vote for the president. For the first time citizens were to vote a person. Previously, they only vote the picture of political party and the political party have the rights to decide their cadre to represent the voter.

Decentralization opens an opportunity for local elites to demand the formation of new autonomous governments at provincial and regency level. North Maluku Province is an example of a new province, established in 4 October 1999. Segregated from Maluku Province, North Maluku Province was the first new province during decentralization era. The youngest province in Indonesia during decentralization era is North Kalimantan Province, established 16 November 2012, segregated from East Kalimantan Province. Since the start of decentralization in 1999 until December 2017 there are 34 Province, 416 regencies and 98 cities in Indonesia. The number of regencies in Indonesia from 2013 to 2017 shown in table 1 below.

### Table 1. Number Regencies in Every Province, Tahun 2017

| Province                  | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 |
|---------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Aceh                      | 18   | 18   | 18   | 18   | 18   |
| North Sumatera            | 25   | 25   | 25   | 25   | 25   |
| West Sumatera             | 12   | 12   | 12   | 12   | 12   |
| Riau                      | 10   | 10   | 10   | 10   | 10   |
| Jambi                     | 9    | 9    | 9    | 9    | 9    |
| South Sumatera            | 13   | 13   | 13   | 13   | 13   |
| Bengkulu                  | 6    | 6    | 6    | 6    | 6    |
| Lampung                   | 13   | 13   | 13   | 13   | 13   |
| Kepulauan Bangka          | 6    | 5    | 5    | 5    | 5    |
| Belitung                  | 5    | 1    | 1    | 1    | 1    |
| DKI Jakarta               | 1    | 1    | 1    | 1    | 1    |
| Jawa Barat                | 18   | 18   | 18   | 18   | 18   |
| Jawa Tengah               | 29   | 29   | 29   | 29   | 29   |
| DI Yogyakarta             | 4    | 4    | 4    | 4    | 4    |
| Jawa Timur                | 29   | 29   | 29   | 29   | 29   |
| Banten                    | 4    | 4    | 4    | 4    | 4    |
| Bali                      | 8    | 8    | 8    | 8    | 8    |
| West Nusa Tenggara        | 8    | 8    | 8    | 8    | 8    |
| East Nusa Tenggara        | 21   | 21   | 21   | 21   | 21   |
| West Kalimantan           | 12   | 12   | 12   | 12   | 12   |
| Central Kalimantan        | 13   | 13   | 13   | 13   | 13   |
| South Kalimantan          | 11   | 11   | 11   | 11   | 11   |
Data presented on the table above shows that during year 2013 until year 2017, three new regencies were established, they are all located in South East Sulawesi Province. Therefore, the number of regencies in Indonesia were increased from 413 regencies in year 2013 toward 416 regencies in year 2014 until year 2017. During the same period, the number of cities remain the same, 98 cities. The change of system into decentralization give opportunities for regions to optimally develop their economic resources. In some cases, these were followed by forming new autonomous regions at provincial or regencies/cities level, in accordance with their geographical size, number of populations, economic potential, as well as their historical and socio-cultural backgrounds.

A wide power and authorities given to local governments hypothetically should be able to boost the development of regions in Indonesia and the nation, better than before the implementation of decentralization. However, there is no fact recently found that the creation of these new autonomous regions already starting in 1999 and recently in year 2013 were able to improve the development of these new regions. Besides causing the effect of upsizing governments through the creation of new local governments, economic disparity among regions remains high.

The decentralization of power and finance to local governments do not necessarily improve the regional economic development. Study by Wahyuntari and Pujjati (2016) explains that during the period of 2009 to 2013, economic disparity in Central Java Province was the second highest after DKI Jakarta Province, among other provinces in Java Island. This is shown by Central Java Province’s Williamson Index of 0.21 with Gross Domestic Regional Product 5.83%. Economic disparity in Central Java Province is caused by disparity of economic growth and per capita income growth among regencies or cities in this province. During the same period, East Java Province had the lowest level of economic disparity, with Williamson Index 0.10 and Gross Regional Domestic Product of 6.55%. There are no new local governments in this province, and the data shows that eventhough local governments have a wider authority in managing their economic resources, economic achievements among regions were different. Data shown in Table II.

| Province       | Regional GDP (%) | Rank | Williamson Index | Rank |
|----------------|------------------|------|------------------|------|
| DKI Jakarta    | 6.18             | 2    | 0.89             | 1    |
| East Java      | 5.85             | 3    | 0.14             | 3    |
| Central Java   | 5.83             | 5    | 0.21             | 2    |
| Jogiakarta Special Region | 5.04 | 6 | 0.05 | 5 |
| East Java      | 6.55             | 1    | 0.02             | 6    |
| Banten         | 5.84             | 4    | 0.10             | 4    |

Source: Statistics Indonesia 2018

The obvious fact was only the rises of new local political elites as an addition to political elites in charge at central government. These new elites took office at the local governments and local house of representatives, sometimes acting as if they are small local kings with power and authorities under decentralization system. Even the governors as the representative of central government at local level have difficulties in coordinating head of regencies and mayors during decentralization era, especially when they came from different political parties.

V. CHALLENGES TO INTEGRITY UNDER DECENTRALIZATION

Direct general election following the implementation of decentralization brings hope for the rise of new generation of leaders. New leaders who were born through direct general elections were expected to become better leaders, more responsible and accountable to their constituent. Starting in 2004, as an answer for the demand of a wider democratization, all political positions from the head of local governments (regencies and cities), governors, member of local house of representatives, member of house of representatives, senators and president-vice president are directly elected by the people. In the Special Province of Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam, they even have their local political parties, competing in their separated local general election system to choose their leaders.

The rise of these new local authorities, formed through direct elections somehow does not necessarily correlate with the improvement in public services and public sector integrity. One root problem for this is the recruitment mechanism for the candidate of head of local governments or house of representatives. Direct election system is expensive, and political party needs to have candidates with strong resources for campaigning activities. Besides that, their
candidates should also be a popular and easy to love figures, capable to attract voters to win the general election.

In order to survive the competition, political parties during decentralization era have becoming more open to external figures, eventhough previously they were not active members of the party. There is an enlargement recruiting mechanism for political candidacy. Before decentralization, political candidacy mostly dominated by active political party member, active military and police personnel. Later after decentralization, political parties also recruit a wide range of public figures from artists, musicians, comedian, ulamas/religious group activists, businessmen, journalists, athletes, housewives, retired bureaucrats, retired military and police personnel, social organizations activists, youth organization activists, community leaders, public figures and many other social backgrounds.

Political position which becoming more accessible to public, attracts more people to join political party, only to compete for the next election. In some cases, these external figures do not always have to become the member of political party. They may remain as independent figures who compete in the general election under supports of political party or coalition of political parties. The main important factor is they must be able to gain as many votes as possible to ensure the party will win the general election. Such condition makes ideological preferences rather fluid. No rigid ideological preferences become a reason when one decided to be a member of political. Otherwise one may also keep their positions as an independent figure who is nominated by political party or coalition of parties. Therefore, these new political elites are pragmatists and short term oriented, with the goal only to win the next general election. It is common for these new political elites to shift their political membership. Political parties were also in shortage of young and new cadres, as a result of their noncontinuous internal cadre forming mechanism. On the other side, elections are kept on running. In order to survive they have to recruit new figures from outside the party, who are interested with political position, popular, have strong economic resources and capable in gaining votes. Such situation makes both political parties and candidates are trapped in political pragmatism, with the ultimate goal is just to win the general election.

The downside of such condition is the practice of money politics. It has already started from the beginning, the recruiting process, where candidates have to give moneys to political party as a submission fee in order to be nominated by the party for the election. Another amount of moneys from the candidates also have to go during campaigning period. These moneys are used to fulfill campaigning logistics such as organizing meetings, musical concert, or cultural parade, printing brochures, stickers, shirts, posters, food, and fees for persons assigned as witnesses in voting places during the general election day. It is also common that these moneys also go in cash, to be given to certain communities as social aids.

Political recruitment that spends a lot of moneys from individual candidates have resulted in the existence of groups of governors, head of local governments as well as member of house of representatives who have invested a lot of moneys to win the general election. Some candidates who fail the general election going bankrupt. Some who are successfully win the election and take the office, use their position and power during their term to regain the moneys they have spent or if possible, even to gain profit. Trapped in such “investment like” situation makes these new leaders make decisions and formulate policies that enable them to gain individual financial profit. Bribes were also performed by some head of local governments to gain approval from the member of house of representatives to ease the execution on local budget policy. According to Indonesia’s Corruption Eradication Commission, there are some public services sector that are prone to corruption practices. Some of them are public services and goods procurements, licensing and investments, citizenship administrative, grants and aids. In some cases, civil servant and contract employee recruitments are also being corrupted. People have to give some money to apply as a civil servant or contract employee.

The apprehensive phenomena occur during decentralization era is the decentralization of corruptive behavior. The Corruption Eradication Commission has caught several political actors, ranging from head of Indonesia’s House of Representatives, member of Indonesia’s house of representatives, ministers, governors, head of regencies and cities, head or member of local house of representatives, high level bureaucrats involved in corruptions cases. The Corruption Eradication Commission Annual Report 2016 reported that political actors involved in 32% of corruption cases occur between 2004 until 2016. Corruption cases found in public goods and services procurements, public budget execution, licensing, fees and money laundering. On the next year, The Corruption Eradication Commission Annual Report 2017 reported that from 2004 until 2017, the commission has caught 144 members of house of representative at central and local level, 18 governors, 71 head of regencies and mayors, and 175 high level bureaucrats ranging from Ith echelon until IIIth echelon for corruption cases.

These cases certainly are not the outcome that is expected by the people who gave their vote for some of those officials during the election. Taking a futher observation, the corruptive behaviors are not dominated only by political elite and bureaucracy. Even common citizen cannot escape from the corruptive behaviors. Some are still preferred to take shortcut to enjoy public services, for instance in licensing, or education. The cases of fraud poverty documents in order to gain a place in public school during the admission period was just one case. Meanwhile in private sectors, the tight competition in business environment makes businessmen tend to pay bribes to head of local governments of head of agencies in order to win goods and services procurements. These practices compromise the quality of public services and goods that are enjoyed by citizen, due to high cost economy. Other corruptions like cases also involving non-governmental organization or societal organizations activists by acting as if they are pressure groups. Sometimes they intimidate the head of local governments or businessmen on sensitive issues only to build a bargaining power. They later exploited this bargaining power in favour of getting some moneys from both parties.
The press, is a big industry after decentralization since banning policy is no longer implemented by the government. The press industry grows rapidly as the spirit of democratization are widely open, following the reformation movement. This attracts conglomerates to invest in the mass media industry. Some of them are network press, owned by conglomerates who are currently also head or founded political parties. Unavoidably, this creates conflict of interest among the press which make them difficult to perform their function as social control institutions. Therefore, it is still an open question whether decentralization in Indonesia which is implemented since 1999 have managed to drive public sector integrity in Indonesia.

VI. PROMISING TRENDS UNDER DECENTRALIZATION

Despite of corruption cases which occurs during decentralization era, some promising leaders with integrity also arises. They able to understand, absorb the spirit of decentralization by performing innovations. Some local governments have been trying to become more accountable and perform best practice in public services delivery, in three main public sector areas which are prone the risk of being corrupted. They introduce single window services for licensing and investment, better public services and goods, as well as planning and budgeting mechanism. Such best practice generally supported by web-based applications to make the services becoming more efficient, transparent, and easy to access. Decentralization also stimulates the local governments to innovate many kinds of public services delivery in accordance to their potentials and competitive advantages. Some local government leaders even successfully achieved international awards, for example Surabaya City Government who was awarded with the Lee Kuan Yew World City Prize Special Mention Category, Global Green City from the United Nations, Learning City from the UNESCO and ASEAN Tourism Award.  

Another recent breakthrough is conducted by the State Employment Agency, by blocking civil servants’ employee identification number who already verificied by court decision with permanent legal force as an actor of corruption. The blocking is expected to deter and prevent corruption among civil servants in Indonesia. When someone’s employee identification number is blocked, this individual will lose the rights as government employee. The blocking will also be followed by the termination status as a government employee.

There is no other way that this systemic and already chronic problems must be overcome by systematic approach. President Joko Widodo administration try to solve this challenge by promoting Mental Revolution Movement. From critical perspectives, this call for mental revolution is correct. But the question is how to implement this, and how to make it as voluntary universal movement in Indonesia, otherwise it will only become a slogan. In short, public sector integrity in Indonesia have a better chance if every citizen led by new generation of leaders working together and have a same agenda for a better Indonesia.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

Decentralization provides opportunities to improve public sector integrity, however in the last two decades this system has not been able to really boost significant progress. The background behind decentralization was one cause. It is not systematically planned, well prepared, and implemented by stages to establish good governance and clean government system in Indonesia. Decentralization was implemented in a very limited time, with enormous power and authority given to the local governments who were not ready. It was only served as an instrument to answer student reformation movement, political and economic crisis and threat of the nation disintegration in 1998. The premature implementation of decentralization also left some political and system of law problems. Besides that, problems still persist because preconditions for a successful implementation of decentralization such as transparency and accountability and other good governance principles have not been fulfilled.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Several preconditions are needed to make decentralization successful and supports the improvement of public sector integrity. A set of regulations should be performed to ensure political parties becoming more accountable. When they accept moneys from the government or individuals, they have to disclose them to public and available for auditing. They should also conduct a continuous leadership program to create their future leaders/candidate. Any individual track records should become their consideration when they recruit a new member or supporting outside figures for general elections. Bureaucracy, military and police must be kept their neutrality during general election, and keep on working based on constitution and regulation. Capacity building are also essential, enabling them to innovate best practices in public service delivery and decrease the culture of business as usual in delivering services.

Social medias can be used as an instrument to promote services and monitor the quality of services. In relation with that, citizens, private sectors and civil society organization should also push public sector integrity as an important agenda. They should take an active part in shaping reformed governance system under good governance principles. Awareness and participation in shaping reformed governance system can not arise spontaneously. It must be systematically internalized to become the citizens’ ideology. Public education since early childhood can be used as a strategic instrument to internalize the principles of good governance to citizens.

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