

# Chapter 32

## The Development and Modernization of Minangkabau People in Sumatera Barat in Indonesia and Its Impact on Local Identity

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**Abstract** Development and modernization are government programs that are aimed at transforming a country into a more advanced condition. Since its independence in 1945, there have been three government systems conducting these programs in Indonesia. From 1945 to 1966, the programs of development and modernization were carried out by the Old Order regime. The New Order regime took the task in 1966 until it began to unravel in 1998. After a fundamental reform in 1998, the duty of carrying out development and modernization across the country is no longer in the hands of the central government in Jakarta, but handed over to local governances or provincial governances. It is also worth noting that reforms in 1998 granted local governments a greater autonomy to manage their regions. These three government systems have significant differences in fulfilling their responsibility in developing and modernizing Indonesia. Consequently, these differences also have a significant impact on creating scores of social changes, especially in terms of identity change of local people in Indonesia. The most prevalent difference, in regard to identity of the local people, can be observed between the rule of the New Order regime and the administration of local autonomy government.

**Keywords** Development · Modernization · Local identity

### 32.1 Content

The New Order administration has attempted to develop and modernize the people of Minangkabau in which during the processes, they have changed the ethnic style of government, namely *pemerintahan nagari* with village governmental system. However, after the reforms, the former system is reconstructed so that the Minangkabau people are able to re-practice their customary governmental system.

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Changes in local government system, both directly and indirectly, may influence the social dynamic of the Minangkabau people. Most importantly, these changes also affect this ethnic's social aspects. The most feasible problem from these changes is the magnitude of differences between the notion of development and modernization carried by the village government system and *pemerintahan nagari*. In summary, therefore, the changes in question had a great implication on the rise and fall of the Minangkabau people's identity.

To investigate how changes in local identity emerge because of different policies of development and modernization carried by *pemerintahan nagari* and village governmental system, I have conducted interviews and delivered questionnaires to 350 respondents. To analyse the effect of the changes from *pemerintahan nagari* to village governmental system and the revival of *pemerintahan nagari* in the era of local autonomy, I utilize structural functional theory. This theory emphasizes that social changes result from changes in a particular society's system. These changes have two implications, namely: stability and instability. In Indonesia, the change from local style of governmental system to village governmental system and the revival of the former system are considered as changes in system, which lead to social changes pointing to stability and instability.

The change from local style of government system to village government system was regulated by the New Order rule in 1980 as one of its efforts to develop and modernize the country. It is found that this policy has marginalized the role of local norms and values. Worst, as in the case of the Minangkabau people, norms and values imposed by village governmental system are at odds with local customs. This change has accordingly generated many polemics and conflicts in the said society.

The most lucid social change observed as a result of the change from *pemerintahan nagari* to village governmental system is the diminishing level of unity in the customary society. It is caused by the village system which divides the customary geography of a *nagari* that makes the existence of a *nagari* threatened and paralyses its legal foundation to unite the people to achieve a common goal. Furthermore, the founding of village governmental system is also one of the crucial factors which led to the vanishing of the *nagari* autonomy, which had been preserved for a long time by the Minangkabau people. Moreover, the village governmental system also has a hand in destroying the authority of customary laws which has a direct effect on the management of *tanah ulayat* (customary land), as the *nagari*'s economic asset. During the village governmental system, *tanah ulayat* was controlled by unauthorized persons and was not utilized to the benefit of a *nagari* or towards prosperity of the people.

In Minangkabau land, due to the surplus of the budget, the New Order rule founded many villages. In other words, those villages were founded not on solid ground. As a result, the village governmental system only spawns problems in Minangkabau. To put it in another way, these problems deny the Minangkabau people social order and subsequently no development materializes. Thus, the village governmental system whose initial objective was to transform the people of Minangkabau is not achieved.

Development and modernization policies that do not consider social aspects, which are practiced by local people, have violated the role of customary laws, customary institutions, and social traditions which play a significant function in the building of social order. Moreover, this infringement has made customary approach to solve a particular social problem is largely crippled. Further, these policies have also caused many conflicts and social problems since the tools to watch the people's behavior have died out.

The village governmental system has also marginalized the role of customary institutions and terminated the existence of customary legislative and judicative bodies which have been founded by the *pemerintahan nagari*. Consequently, the head of the village will become the sole power holder, i.e. the absolute executive, which betrays the tradition of democracy cherished in the tradition of the Minangkabau people. Automatically, the installment of the head of the village by the central government has ended the tradition of elections and consensus which are a prominent characteristic of this ethnic. Worst, the diminishing of these traditions have denied the people education in politics and democracy. Moreover, the head of the village is also perceived as lacking the legitimate right to rule since he/she is not chosen directly by the people. As a result, their governments find it difficult to relate harmoniously with the common people. At the same time, this condition also prevents the people to actively participate in the development and modernization programs. Thus, consequent to the imposition of the village governmental system in Minangkabau, many social programs designed by the government do not seem to materialize.

The tradition of consensus also meets its decline in the social life of the people during the village governmental system. Many important decisions related to the well-being of the people are taken unilaterally by the central government and are passed on to the head of the village as its dignitary. In other words, the people are left with no choice other than complying with those decisions. Consequently, the tradition of mutual aid and cooperation, which are the social capital of the Minangkabau people, are gradually corroded. In short, the people of Minangkabau are contextually cornered as mere power subjects who are constantly demanded to act in accordance with the rules of the central government.

Another implication of the decline of the tradition of mutual aid and cooperation is the dependence of the development and modernization programs on the government budget. In fact, the people can be involved in helping the government to complete those programs. It is worth noting that this dependence on the government budget took grave toll after 1987 whereby the government of West Sumatra province, where the Minangkabau people reside, faced serious polemic challenges since several villages had to be merged into one village out of financial concerns for the central government which began to reduce its funds for village development and modernization programs. Subsequently, the village government could not speed up the effort to oversee prosperity of the people. Hence, poverty is still a major problem in villages and the initial objective of the founding of the village governmental system is not fully met.

Furthermore, the existence of the village governmental system in Minangkabau has also eroded the tradition of the people sitting together to discuss the development plans for their region. In other words, it is a down top planning in which people intend to develop what they need the most. On the contrary, the central government tends to nationalize its policies without considering the large number of different ethnicities in Indonesia and the multitude of differences they have. To put it in another way, the government's development and modernization program is a top-down policy. Sometimes this kind of policy becomes a serious blunder for the government since they give the people what they do not need or vice versa. Subsequently, the government fails to arrive at its objectives such as making poverty history in rural areas.

The people of *Minangkabau* value the philosophy of *adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi kitabullah* (Minangkabau customary laws are based on Islamic regulations which are derived from the holy Qur'an). In other words, in *Minangkabau* what the religion, which is officially Islam, has promulgated becomes the people customs. Meanwhile, during the reign of the village governmental system, this synergy experienced critical waning since the government did not provide enough facilities which can be utilized to carry on the tradition. Consequently, it is no wonder at all that a younger generation is deprived of this tradition, in other words, they are short of knowledge on both religion and custom. Hence, they are in the way of losing their identity as *Minangkabau* people. Thus, the village governmental system has made the *Minangkabau* culture, as a whole, prone to extinction.

On the contrary, after the fall of the New Order rule, the local governments are granted more autonomy. For this reason, the development programs are conducted against each ethnic's socio-political and cultural background. To put it in another way, modernization is no longer seen under the light of leaving the traditions behind. Hence, in Minangkabau, people are eager to reconstruct the system of *pemerintahan nagari*. Therefore, for the *Minangkabau* people, the era of local autonomy is the time to reconstruct their long lost tradition.

It is also important to trace the history of the rise and fall of the system of *pemerintahan nagari* in *Minangkabau*. During the time of Dutch colonialism, this system was acknowledged as written in Article 71 RR (*Regeer-ringsreglement*) or Article 128 IS (*Indische-staatsregeling*). After the Japanese ousted the Dutch, they did not bother with the system, even, they legitimized it in Japanese Government Regulation No. 1 year 1942 and *Osamu Rei* Regulation No. 27 year 1942. After Indonesia gained its independence in 1945, this country was ruled by the Old Order regime. Interestingly, this regime did not mind with the system of *pemerintahan nagari*. In contrast, the New Order administration which came to power in 1966, issued a regulation to replace each ethnic's traditional governmental system with village governmental system, which automatically sent the Minangkabau governmental system into disappearance. However, this system was reconstructed in the era of local autonomy as written in Regulation No. 22 year 1999 and the Regulation of West Sumatra Government No. 9 year 2000.

Based on the regulation mentioned above, local government began to launch people-based development policies. It means, these policies consider and respect the local people's socio-cultural context. Hence, traditions and culture are no longer perceived as something old-fashioned. Interestingly, traditions and culture are currently seen as perfect partners for the government to complete their development policies. Therefore, it is not exaggerating if there is a claim that units of customary society are widely celebrated in Indonesia. It is in line with the principle of Chapter I, Article no 1, part 15 of Constitution No. 22 year 1999 which states that *a nagari is one of the customary society units which has the authority to rule and manage local people's affairs in regard to local customs and is acknowledged by national government*. Further, the Regulation of West Sumatra Government No. 9 year 2000 clearly states that:

the system of pemerintahan nagari is perceived as effective in preserving the religion and traditions of the people of West Sumatra, who are democratic and have aspirations in materializing an independent society and pemerintahan nagari is also remarked as a way in which the people can actively and creatively involve in developing the region, the right the New Order rule has denied them.

Importantly, this regulation has authorized the reunification of the geographically divided *nagari* caused by the founding of the village governmental system instigated by the New Order administration. This unification is recognized as a crucial thing to be carried since it will found a *pemerintahan nagari* which has solid autonomy. The implication of this unification is to clarify the unit of the customary society of that *nagari* and to revive the function of the *nagari's* customary institution and economic asset, namely *tanah ulayat*. Meanwhile, in the era of local autonomy, enormous changes took place in Minangkabau. For an instance, traditions which had been promoted by the village governmental system are radically changed to follow the needs of the *pemerintahan nagari*. One of the most prominent features of the revival of the system of *pemerintahan nagari* is that people began to practice many long lost traditions. It comes along with the rise of customary laws, customary institutions, *orang adat* (customary people), religious elites, and local democracy.

The ascendance of local democracy can be observed in the way the Minangkabau people vote for their leaders. In other words, currently, every head of the *nagari* is voted by the population of that *nagari* via popular elections. Subsequently, the people of Minangkabau have succeeded in releasing the hegemony of the central government. The most visible implication of the tradition of elections is that people have chance to undergo political education, which the village governmental system had disallowed them previously.

Moreover, the reconstruction of *balai adat* (customary hall) implies the return of the tradition of consensus among the Minangkabau people. Importantly, *balai adat* suggests that democracy finds its place among the people. The implication of the return of the customary hall is that people began to sit together to discuss and arrange their own development plans. In other words, the pattern of the *nagari's* development is down-top, in contrast to the top-down pattern during the rule of

village governmental system. As a result, the *nagari*'s development programmes hit the right target. Therefore, the development programmes carried by the system of *pemerintahan nagari* are an effort to minimize the development programmes which are based on hegemony.

In addition, the era of local autonomy is marked by the return of the ideal democratic governmental system whereby there is no particular party that holds a supreme power. In the system of *nagar*, there are other two pivotal elements namely: legislative institution and judicative institution that keep an eye on how the executive institution runs the *nagari*. In other words, *pemerintahan nagari* resembles the administration of a modern republic. To be exact, *pemerintahan nagari* is a mini republic. Consequently, this development has empowered the authority of customary institutions and re-imposed the customary laws. It is also worth noting that the customary institution is a formal body, so that it will not be easily challenged by the central power.

Another objective of the re-activating of the customary institutions is to solve problems emerging within the society by approaching them from customary laws' point of view. Initially, customary institutions were founded to shoulder the task of internalizing customs with culture in people's everyday lives. However, as impinged earlier in this study, the founding of village governmental system has sent this institution into a dormant state for more than two decades, so that there is no institution responsible for educating the people in regard to their customs. Hence, we can also understand that efforts to re-activate customary institutions are ways to resolve social problems by using customary laws and are means to construct effective tools which are potential to maintaining socio-cultural based social stability. In addition, *pemerintahan nagari* also established religious institutions as an instrument to edify the people to live by their religion.

Presently, in many *nagaris*, people are busy organizing movements related to religious and traditional studies that are aimed at re-creating the *nagari*'s social dynamic, which is based on the philosophy of *adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi kitabullah*. Further, the current trend of returning to the system of *pemerintahan nagari* can be perceived as, on the one hand, an endeavour to restore the people's tradition, and on the other hand, to challenge the 'modern' tradition implanted by the central government. The clearest feature of this resistance effort is the re-implementation of customary rules. Afterwards, the dynamics of the *nagari*'s social life are experiencing transformation from the dynamics of modernization into a new dynamic which is derived from Minangkabau traditions and culture. This change is also followed by the return of the tradition of *hidup berkaum* (communal living) which is aimed at resisting the notion of individualism; a direct product of the village governmental system. The restoration of the system of *pemerintahan nagari* can be read as an attempt to reconstruct traditions and the dynamics of social life which fit Minangkabau culture. Hence, in the era of local autonomy, the people of Minangkabau are embracing their initial cultural identity, which the village governmental system has denied them. This change is actually caused by village governmental system's failure to develop and modernize the people. Moreover, it has been duly proven that the village governmental system has lacerated numerous

aspects that are responsible for social stability. In short, the failure of the government to develop and modernize the people is their insensitivity toward the people's culture and social values; they radically change the tradition and install a new culture which is completely different from the people's initial culture.

## 32.2 Conclusions

Conclusively, the village governmental system, which was originally planned to speed up the process of development and modernization, has fallen short. In the case of the people of Minangkabau, the village governmental system has generated many social conflicts which obviously slow down the various attempts to development. Furthermore, the village governmental system in Minangkabau has mouldered traditions, which are functional to preserve social stability. In other words, that system has failed to bring prosperity and social stability. Hence, in the era of local autonomy, the people of Minangkabau challenged that system and they re-constructed their once-marginalized governmental system.

This change is in line with functional theory, which states that stability is the fountain of harmony, dynamism, and integration in a society. If changes imposed to that society will only cause instability, it is normal to find out movements to revive the marginalized system to restore the stability. For instance, the people of Minangkabau identify that their traditional and social systems are able to conceive stability compared to what the New Order administration has enforced on them. Hence, it is not exaggerating to say that development and modernization programs, which are not based on traditions and cultural values, will never succeed. For the people of Minangkabau, the road to development and modernization is to go back to their own traditions. Therefore, there is solid ground to argue that traditions are supportive of development since they contain a worldview that materialises dynamism.

Learning from the fall and rise of the *pemerintahan nagari* system, it is clear that the development and modernization policies orchestrated by the New Order government have instigated changes in the identity of the Minangkabau people. This identity change is the direct result of the village governmental system policy that is completely contradictory to the system the people of Minangkabau traditionally practice. This change has made the identity of the Minangkabau people comply with what the village governmental system has designed. In other words, power is able to change identity. However, identity change can trigger social instability. Consequently, social conflicts will arise and the path to development and prosperity, as wished by government, are difficult to achieve.

In the era of local autonomy, Minangkabau social traditions are no longer seen as challenges to development and modernization. It means during the local autonomy era, those programs do not harm the people's identity anymore. In this context, it is wise if we refer to Eriksen (1993), who postulates that identity is changeable and the party who owns the power to do so can control the direction of

its transformation. In other words, those who rule the people can determine those people's identity. In the case of the people of Minangkabau, during the reign of the village governmental system with their development and modernization programs, the people's identity is the one that the authority directs them to adopt. On the contrary, during the era of local autonomy, when development and modernization programs are controlled by *pemerintahan nagari*, the people's identity goes along with what their traditions require them to embrace.

Therefore, the transformation from *pemerintahan nagari* to the village governmental system and vice versa is more than changes in terms of bureaucracy, administration, and governmental system. Accordingly, it has something to do with social changes which influence social stability and social order. In this context, the authority has to consider carefully whether their development and modernization programs will bring about stability or, in contrast, instability. Hence, those programs have to take into account the people's reception of the same programs. Important to note is that, the authority is not supposed to pressurize its will on the people. If the authority fails to do so, it has to be ready to bite the bullet and consequently its objectives are never obtained.

## Reference

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