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Challenges in Implementation of ICT for Budget Accountability and Development of Budget Information Literacy

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Abstract. In the case of Karanganyar Regency, this study identify that although the public aspire to have an adequate understanding about the APBD, the access for obtaining the information is very limited. Data collection methods used in this research were: (1) documents study on the Local Government Development Plan (RKPD) and the Regional Budget (APBD); (2) semi open-ended questionnaires; (3) in-depth interviews; and (4) focus group discussions. The data then analyzed using descriptive analysis and interpretive analysis methods. This paper recognizes the potency of ICT in developing the forum for public access and deliberation related to the budget information; while also identifies the challenges facing the implementation of ICT for the local budget accountability and the development of budget information literacy among the public.

Keywords: budget information literacy, information and communication technology (ICT), public participation

Abstrak. Dalam kasus di Kabupaten Karanganyar, penelitian ini mengidentifikasi bahwa, walaupun masyarakat berkeinginan untuk memiliki pemahaman mengenai APBD, akses untuk mendapatkan informasi mengenai APBD sangat terbatas. Teknik pengumpulan data yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini yaitu: (1) studi literatur pada dokumen Rencana Kerja Pemerintah Daerah (RKPD) dan Anggaran Penerimaan dan Belanja Daerah (APBD); (2) kuesioner semi-terbuka; (3) wawancara mendalam; dan (4) focus group discussions. Metode analisis data menggunakan analisis deskriptif dan analisis intepretasi. Dari penelitian ini didapatkan bahwa potensi TIK dalam mengembangkan forum untuk akses publik dan musyawarah berkaitan dengan informasi anggaran; dan juga mengidentifikasi tantangan yang dihadapi dalam mengimplementasikan ICT untuk akuntabilitas anggaran daerah dan pengembangan informasi literasi anggaran di masyarakat.

Kata kunci: literatur informasi anggaran, information and communication technology (ICT), partisipasi masyarakat

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to describe the application of the information and communication technology (ICT) in the effort of developing regional budget information literacy among the public. The idea of this paper is based on the function of e-governance to strengthen the social accountability, which in the case of this paper, focused on the accountability of the local budget (Anggaran Pendapatan dan Belanja Daerah or APBD).

The roles and applications of ICT in the government had been identified since 1970s (Gronlund in Anttiroiko & Mälkiä, 2007). Along with the shift from the concept of government to governance, there has been a development of the concept of e-governance. In the further development, the two concepts are sometime overlapping. E-government is frequently understood as how the government uses the ICT to improve it efficiency, especially in the public services. This understanding is related to the concept of the function of the government as a sole-agent in providing public services.

This paper will address the implementation of ICT

in the present era of governance concept, especially related to the concept of social accountability. Based on the research in the Regency of Karanganyar, Central Java, this paper identifies and addresses the challenges faced by both the local government and the public in the application of ICT to ensure social accountability of the local budget and the development of budget information literacy among the public.

e-Governance contains two important elements: “governance” as the main concept and “electronic” or ICT as the tool to improve the governance processes. The development of the concept of governance cannot be separated from the shift of the concept from government to governance. The key concept in governance is the consensus through which the difference of interests can be accommodated by the working of the state institution and the strengthening of the market institutions and civil society (Pratikno, 2005). In its development, the concept of governance also include the global state actors beside the state, market, and civil society.

Weiss (2000) notes the introduction of the concept of good governance. There are three categories of concepts

explaining good governance. First, good governance is understood as sound development management—which gives much emphasis on the strengthening the economic sector. The models derived from this concept are market government and deregulated government, where the citizen is positioned as a customer. As a customer, the citizen's capacity is decided by its ability to purchase in the free market mechanism (Peters, 2001). Second, good governance is understood as democratic politics, which is characterized by transparency, participation, representation, accountability and human rights. The roles of nongovernmental organizations are given a major place, including in the global relations between states.

The two categories above have been criticized as reducing the roles of the state, where in fact there is need of a strong state in the good governance. The third category models the good governance where the efficient market economy and the discipline civil society are performed in the strong and effective state. This combination of sound development government and the democratic political governance is represented in the concept of human governance (Ul Haq, 1999; Weiss, 2000; Pratikno, 2005). Human governance includes both the structure and the process that support the creation of a participative, responsive, and accountable government (good political governance) that is enclosed in an economic system that is competitive, non discriminative, and balance (good economic governance); while the citizen is empowered to organize itself (good civic governance). Those characteristic are bound together by principles such as ownership, decency, and accountability.

There are three dimensions of governance (Dwiyanto, 2004). *First*, the dimension of institution; which is an administration system that incorporates multi stakeholders, both government and nongovernment. It emphasizes the involvement of various organizations and actors in the implementation of various activities to solve the problems in the society. *Second*, the value dimension that is used as the basis of power exercise. In the governance, the use of power is not only based on the values of efficiency, effectiveness, social justice, and democracy, but also on the revitalization and empowerment of various values from the local wisdom that are functional to support the development of democratic governance. *Third*, the dimension of process that explains how the government and nongovernment elements build and develop the network to manage the policy making process in order to address the public issues, public affairs, public interests, and to reach the public purpose.

Based on the concept of governance in the previous discussion, this paper defines e-governance as how to use

ICT to improve the participation of all stakeholders—government, NGOs, and civil society—though the distribution of information based on the agreed values in order to improve the usage of resources for addressing the public affairs and reaching the public purpose.

Development of good civic governance requires active participation by citizens who possess a degree of literacy toward the public issues and the process of public policy. Good civil governance also requires a good relationship between governance, citizen, and information literacy; because accountable and responsive government and active citizen could not be realized without information (Bovens, 2005). Information literacy is an important part in building the capacity of the citizen to monitor the government and to demand the accountability of the government, in order to avoid the forms of patrimonialism (Tettey, 2002).

There are three categories of information literacy. *First*, information literacy, where the citizens have the abilities (1) to access the information in an effectively and efficiently; (2) to evaluate the information competently and critically; and (3) to use the information accurately and creatively. *Second*, independent learning, where the citizen—as independent learner—have the abilities (1) to pursue information related to personal interests; (2) to appreciate literature and other creative expressions of information; and (3) to strive for excellence in information seeking and knowledge generation. *Third*, social responsibility, where the citizen contributes positively to the learning community and to the society and (1) recognizes the importance of information to a democratic society; (2) practices ethical behaviour in regard to information and information technology; and (3) participates effectively in groups to pursue and generate information (AASL and AECT, 1998).

Discrepancies in the access and usage of information, and the low level of information literacy will prevent the citizen to participate actively in the government business. The citizen which is information literate will be able to improve its roles to monitor the social accountability of the public policy by the government, including the policy concerning the local budget (APBD).

The theory of accountability explains the obligation of the power holder (accountor) to give valid explanations and justifications for its actions in a certain forum or accountee that give opportunities for dialogues and debates and the presence of sanctions—positive or negative—by the accountee or forum (Pollitt, 2003; Oakerson, 1989; Malena et al., 2004; Boven 2005, 2008). Power holder (accountor) refers to those who hold political, financial, or any other forms of power, including government officials, private companies, international

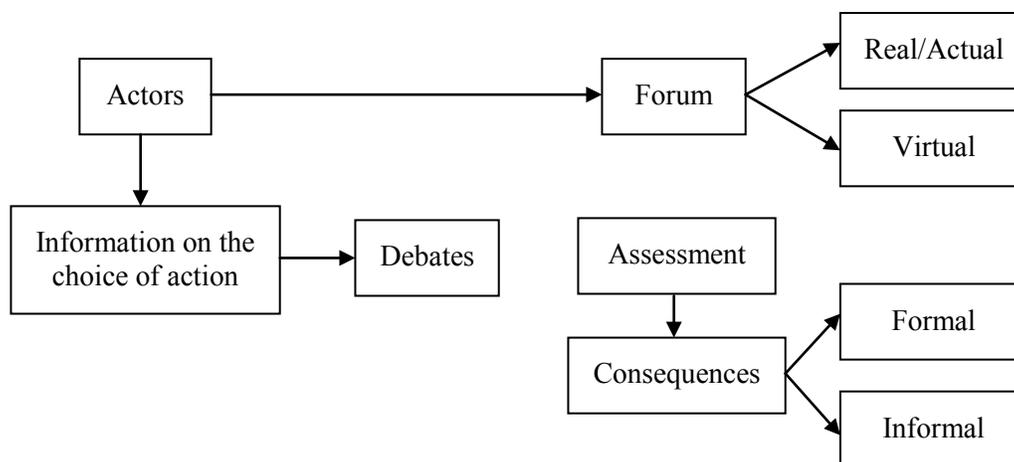


Figure 1. Framework of Accountability

Source: Adapted from Bovans (2005, 2007)

financial organizations, and civil organizations. The accountee is the party who require the accountability; it can be the supervisors, the legislative, other government institutions, and general public (groups and/or individuals). The forum can be in the form of actual/real face-to-face meeting or virtual/mediated. The diagram of accountability is presented below. Based on the framework of accountability (Fig. 1), ICT can be functioned as a forum—a space for conversation, discussion, assessment and/or administering sanctions by the accountee for the performance of the accountant.

Along with the development of the governance concepts, the approach of accountability has been shift from the supply side to the demand side. *Supply side approach* represents the accountability of the government accountee using methods such as the political checks and balances, procedures and administrative regulations, audit process, and the supervision by the law enforcer (the police and/or the distric attorney). *Demand side approach*, which also known as the *social accountability*, requires the empowerment of the citizen (especially the poor) to request the accountability and responsibility from the public officials, politicians, and public service providers (Malena, Forster, and Singh, 2004). Along with this view, ICT can be used as media to bring together the accountant and the accountee. The accountant can use ICT to provide explanation and justification for the policy; while the accountee can use the media to ask questions as well as to give assessment to the information given by the accountant.

The social accountability requires information transparency and a forum where the relation between accountant and the accountee take place (Bovans, 2007). Transparency is the essential requirement for the accountability of public organization, because inefficiency and corruption thrive in the “darkness”. Tranparency

itself is defined as “the availability and accessibility of relevant information about the functioning of the polity” (Gerring and Thacker, 2004). The definition indicates the two components that are essential for the development of transparency, which are (1) the availability of the public information, which is related to the issue of contents; and (2) the accessibility of the public information, related to the issue of methods or procedures in obtaining the contents that relevant to the public interest. The accessibility of the public information requires adequate capabilities of the public to find, comprehend and use the information that they need—in other word, it requires a certain degree of public information literacy.

In the report for the UNESCO, entitled “Information Literacy for an Active and Effective Citizenship”, Coreia (2002) proposed model of the policies that should be considered when developing public information literacy: (1) Education for Citizenship (as a continuous process, both in the formal education system and in the informal adult education system for lifelong learning) – the role of information related skills is explained; (2) Creation of an information environment, through the implementation of Information Policies—with the emphasis on access and provision of quality information for citizenship; (3) Public and Civil Society Institutions as Information Intermediaries.

Education for Citizenship equips the citizen to take active and effective roles and involvement in their governance—as oppose to passively accepting and obeying without thought the dictate of other, including the government.

Creation of an information environment, through the implementation of Information Policies to provide quality and accessible information for the citizen. There are a number of policies and strategies that have a significant impact on the development of an environment that

promotes information literacy initiatives for active and effective citizenship, such as: (1) eGovernment (delivery of government information and services through the Internet and other digital means) and access to Government held information (Public sector information access and delivery); (2) content creation (initiatives undertaken by governments to ensure that suitable content is made available to the citizens (Muir and Oppenheim, 2001); (3) development of the technological infrastructure that will allow access to ICT, including access by the poorer nations (an issue very high on the international political agenda as indicated by the organization of the forthcoming World Summit on Information Society, promoted by the United Nations, in collaboration of the ITU – International Telecommunication Union, in 2003 (United Nations, 2002); (4) data protection - i.e. protecting individuals from unwanted and harmful uses of data about them (Oppenheim 2001: 161); and (5) Freedom of Information (FoI) is the legislation concerned primarily with facilitating general access to information created by, or held by Government, while ensuring that individuals are aware of and have some control over data that concerns them at a personal level (Feather, 1998).

Establishing *Public and Civil Society Institutions as Information Intermediaries* means providing the citizen with institutions who facilitate and support the citizen in obtaining and understand the information they need. Such intermediary institutions are needed because in the society there are citizens who do not have the time and ability to read and understand fully the information provided for them. This situation is true in the developing countries like Indonesia, where the majority of the citizens are information poor and do not have the skill to interpret and analyze the information that is available.

Discrepancies in the access and usage of information, and the low level of information literacy among will prevent the citizen to participate actively in the governance. The questions that need to be answered is: what are the issues that need to be addressed in the usage of ICT to improve the public information literacy so that it can function as a social accountability forum.

RESEARCH METHODS

The data of this research were collected from: (1) members of community in Karanganyar (community social organizations, nongovernment organization, representatives of local government, PKK, and sectoral community organizations); and (2) the SKPD (local government offices), consist of 30 SKPDs.

Data collection methods used in this research were: (1) documents study on the Local Government Development

Plan (RKPD) and the Regional Budget (APBD); (2) semi open-ended questionnaires; (3) in-depth interviews; and (4) focus group discussions. The data then analyzed using descriptive analysis and interpretive analysis methods.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

From the analysis on the APBD, the research finds that in general the government of Karanganyar allocated around Rp. 886.6 millions (approx. 0.36% of the total annual budget) for the dissemination of information to the public. The amount allocated for each dissemination programs/activities are varied with the range from Rp. 4 millions to Rp. 75 millions per program/activity.

The information dissemination programs are thematic or project-based, using various methods: (1) group communication in various group meetings; (2) communication through the KIM (community information groups); and (3) mass communication through print media (local news paper and government publications), electronic media (radio, TV, and the internet via government website), and outdoor medias (posters, billboards, notice boards).

Based on the data, this research concluded that there is a sufficient opportunity and resources (i.e. budget, community groups) that can be used to develop budget information literacy using the ICT. The challenges, then, are how the local government will present the information in a way that is both accessible and easily understood by the citizens.

The research also found the various community groups in the region need a particular information related to the sector they are concern with (for example, the GAPOKTAN or farmer group needs information about the budget plan for the agricultural sector); therefore there are needs to provide such information by every SKPD to deliberate its budget plan and priorities. The problem that makes the SKPDs seems to be reluctant in disseminating budget information to the public is the concern on the possibility of misuse of the information by the community. In the FGDs and interview with the SKPD's, there were stories of "blackmailing" attempts by certain parties by using the budget information.

Related to the concern of misusing the budget information, in the FGDs with the community groups we find that the community groups can perform supervision/control functions on each other, to prevent the budget information misuse. We found that there are different levels of access to budget information, which lead to receiving funding from APBD, among the community groups. There are groups that have a good relationship (in many cases personal relationship with the staffs) with

the related SKPD, therefore have more access to the information and the funding for their activities. On the other hands, there are groups that almost have no access at all to the information, which in turn limit the funding for their activities. Based on the data above, we conclude that there are possibilities of the application of ICTs that can be used by more community groups to access and use the regional budget information. Not only to get a wider access to the funding of their activities, but also to build a mutual accountability mechanism between the community groups and the SKPD as well as among the community group themselves.

The other issues faced by the SKPD that were surfaced during the FGSs and interviews are the lack of government officers who assigned to the tasks of preparing and updating the budget information for the public. There are also lack of government officers who are trained in providing information and answers for the questions from the public concerning the APBD. This research also found that the ICT infrastructure (both hardware and software) has not been distributed evenly to all the SKPDs in Karanganyar, resulting in the wide gaps among the SKPDs. The other problem identified in this research is the lack of coordination among the SKPDs in delivering the budget information, which in turn make the information for the public usually inaccurate and outdated.

In Karanganyar, the public understanding on the local development issues is usually limited to the practical issues, in many cases that are related to the physical development of the local infrastructures (roads, bridges, schools building, etc.). The survey conducted by this research revealed that 52% of the respondents admit that they do not understand the local budget (APBD), although actually they have the desire to know and understand more about APBD. The desire to know more about the APBD is motivated by intention to advocate their community group's interests. But until now, the interest and desire to understand the budget information in APBD were putted off by the difficulties the experienced in getting, as well as in analyzing and comprehending the budget information.

Various methods that are used by the public in Karanganyar to get information includes: (1) mass media (newspaper, radio, TV, and the internet); (2) direct communication by the program executor (teachers, health counselors, PPL); (3) meetings/seminars conducted by the SKPDs; and (4) community groups meeting. In the case of ICT usage, only 15% of the respondents use the internet to access the information they need.

The respondents judge that the budget information is difficult to access. The problems that are identified from the FGDs and interviews are as follow: (1) the absent

of the needed information from the local government; (2) the provided information is difficult to understand by laypeople and the government officers are unable to give explanations that can be easily understood by the information seekers; (3) the procedures in obtaining the information is complicated and time consuming; and (4) the SKPDs are reluctant to give information, usually using the grounds that the information is classified. The initiative of the government of Karanganyar to upload the summary of the APBD on the government website is viewed as insufficient to promote the budget information transparency, because only a small proportion of the citizen who have access to the internet and the presentation of the budget information is too limited to be useful and comprehensible to the citizen.

The government, therefore, need to have dialogues with the representatives of various community groups to decide what budget information that is needed and how the information should be disseminated. The government then needs to present the budget information in a format that is easily understood by laypeople, as a supplement to the standard format decided by the Ministry of Interior (Kementerian Dalam Negeri). In the FGDs, the representatives of the community groups said that they need certain information from the APBD, such as (1) what programs that will have a direct impact in each sector, (2) how much is the budget for each program; and (3) how the budget will be used. They also want to know how much budget is available for the local community initiatives/programs and the procedure to access and getting the funding.

The community information groups (Kelompok Informasi Masyarakat/KIM) in Karanganyar need to be equipped with the ICT skills, so that the KIMs can act as information intermediary that assist the local citizen in accessing and analyzing the budget information, in order to help the public to monitor the transparency of the budget information. Beside the KIMs, there are various existing community groups that can be empowered to become local information intermediaries, such as Rukun Tetangga (RT), GAPOKTAN, environmental groups, etc.

CONCLUSION

This paper identifies several challenges facing the implementation of ICT for the budget accountability and the development of budget information literacy in the case of Karanganyar Regency, which are: (1) Although the local government has sufficient funds to disseminate the budget information, there are evidences of reluctant among the local government officers to give wider access to the public out of the concerns of the budget information

misuses; (2) There are lack of local government's ability to present the budget information in a format that easily comprehended by the laypeople; (3) The public perceives that the process of accessing budget information is too complicated and bureaucratic; (4) Only a small proportion of the citizen who have access to the internet and the presentation of the budget information, is any, on the government websites is too limited to be useful and comprehensible to the citizen.

Based on the findings of the research, this paper propose recommendations that need to be done if we want to use ICT in improving the public budget information literacy and used as social accountability forum: (1) develop a budget information system using ICT that is accessible to the citizen in the villages (desa or kalurahan); (2) form facilitators in the level of Kecamatan that act as information intermediaries to help the citizen in using the ICT for accessing the budget information and help them to analyze and understand the information; (3) design the most effective budget information format that meet the needs of the citizen and presented in a language that easily understood by the laypeople; (4) empower the local community groups to become a forum to discuss the budget information, to accommodate the citizen's aspiration about the budget priorities, to advocate the needs of the citizen related to the budget, and to demand the accountability in budget usage by the government and/or other community groups.

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