

# Decentralisation Policy to Strengthen Local Government Capacity in Sumedang Regency, West Java Province, Indonesia

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**Abstract**—The new chapter of decentralization in Indonesia began in the reformation era in 2000 and was marked by Law number 22 of 1999 concerning Local Government. It was believed that this Law would bring fundamental changes to local governments in Indonesia. The hope was reflected in the existence of drastic reforms in the management relations among the central government, the provinces and districts/cities, in the distribution of authority among government tiers, in financial resource management, in human and natural resource management, in local legislative roles, public service management, the evaluation and monitoring mechanism, and as well as civic participation. However, lack of preparation, lack of organization and unprepared local capacity caused the implementation of decentralization to be marked by various delays. Hence, reinforcing local capacities is a vital element that should be undertaken by Indonesia government to support decentralization.

**Keyword** : Decentralization, Local Government and Capacity Building

## I. INTRODUCTION

Local capacity improvement should be implemented comprehensively at all levels, which are system, organizational and individual. Therefore, reinforcement done only at one level without being balanced by reinforcement at other levels will not obtain an optimal synergy for local government. Based on the decentralization evaluation report done by Ministry of Home Affairs Republic of Indonesia in 2011, since 2001 almost 67% local governments especially district and city governments have poor performance (MoHA Report, 2011; p77). The poor performance of local government can be seen from many indicators such as low accountability and transparency, low public service, and low quality of local government officials.

This study will focus on how local individual/human resources capacity can support decentralization implementation in Indonesia in Sumedang Regency Government. Sumedang is regency in West Java Province, formerly known as rural area and largely depends on the agricultural sector for its revenues. Hence, in socio-economic terms, Sumedang Regency represents a complex environment and it will be interesting to observe how Sumedang Regency implements decentralization.

In the process of implementing decentralization, Sumedang Regency has focused on enhancing the public service aspect, improvement of accountability and transparency, enhanced public participation, checks and balances mechanism, as well as strengthening the local

capacity of the bureaucracy. The process includes the production of several significant policies, rearrangement of the local government structure and improvements in human resources. The local human resources capacity building in Sumedang Regency has been developed intensively starting from the recruitment process, placement of position and career development. However, implementation still has not shown satisfying results due to various constraints faced such as budget limitations, and the strength of vested interests among local elites.

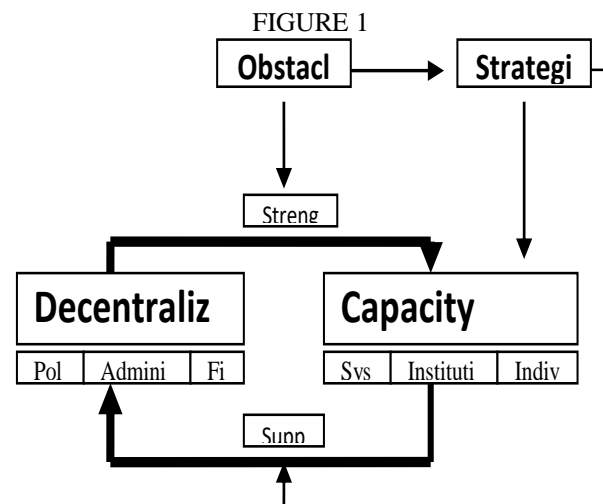
### a. Problem Statement

The major questions of the study are:

1. What are the existing conditions of human resources capacity in Sumedang Regency in implementing decentralization policy?
2. What are the problems of human resources capacity during decentralization implementation in Sumedang Regency?
3. What should local government do to enhance human resources capacity to support decentralization implementation in Sumedang Regency?

### b. Framework of the study

There are many reasons why a nation initiates decentralization policy, one of which is to move decision making closer to the people (Shah and Thomson 2002:6), improve local participation, accountability and transparency, increasing competition in the delivery of service below :



**TABLE 1**  
**THE RESEARCH VARIABLE**

	Dimensions	Focus	Indicator
1.	Individual level	Strengthening professional and technical individual skills and qualifications	Specialty, Human Resource Development, Salary, Merit system, Education and training.

Source : Modified from (Grindle, 1991, GOI National framework, 2001, Kimura; 2006, Organizational Capacity Assessment Tools by GTZ, 2001)

1. Literary review and key concept;

In the last three decades democracy has become a global standard and decentralization is believed as one of the important vehicles for its achievement. Therefore, together with the wave of democracy, decentralization has become unavoidable. Decentralization has emerged without any limitations from developed countries to developing countries, rich countries to poor countries and democratic countries to authoritarian countries. As Oxhorn, Tulchin and Selee (2004:p3) state, “nearly every country in the world, regardless of its political system, geographical location, history, level of economic development and cultural traditions, is now experimenting with new forms of regional and local governance.”

The World Bank noted that almost 95% of democratic nations have implemented decentralization on local government (WB Reports 1999/2000:p119). However, the success of the implementation of decentralization policy in a nation is affected by certain conditions and contexts. These include the level of comprehension of decentralization itself, the aims of decentralization and the government’s ability and readiness to support the decentralization process.

*A. The Concept of Decentralization*

There is no single definition of decentralization. Each political setting has its own definition. Moreover, we can see variations in understanding if we observe how decentralization is being implemented in many countries. Each country has its own definition, form, aim and method of decentralization. As stated by Manor (1999:p26), “The causes of decentralization differ substantially from one place to another”. Further, the multiplicity of theories and the diversity of experiences suggest the probable validity of the following proposition:

1. No single factor is sufficient to explain a decision to decentralize in all countries or in a single country;
2. No single factor is necessary towards decisions to decentralize in all countries;
3. Decentralization in each country is the result of combination of causes; (Ibid: 27).

Basically, decentralization is not only related to connections between central government to local government but also to the connection among Government institutions (central and local) towards the private organizations and the civil society. This is also reinforced by the definition given by the World Bank: “It also

subscribes to both intergovernmental processes (i.e. decentralization of governance between levels of government from federal/central to state/local) and, to a lesser extent, to deregulation or transfer of functions to private, civic and business groups” (WB Report, 1999:p112).

The Indonesia’s mode of decentralization has its own characteristics dealing with relationships among government layers and the distribution of authority. As explained in Law Number 22 year 1999, which was later revised to Law Number 32 year 2004, Chapter 1 Article 1 Letter 7, the country’s official concept of decentralization is “decentralization in the transfer of authority of the central government to the autonomous regions within the framework of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia”.

*B. The motivations and objectives of decentralization*

1. The Motivations of Decentralization

The persistent demand for the implementation of decentralization in Indonesia is relevant to the various experiences of other countries in the world. Centralization is said to have constrained the local government’s role in providing quality public service especially in third world countries. Central government is not able to control the entire breadth and complexity of governance matters. Furthermore, governance will be very complicated for a nation, which has a wide geographical area, numerous population, as well as ethnic, culture and language diversities. This is parallel to Bowman and Hampton’s argument (1984:p4) saying “no central government of a large state can effectively decide what is to be done in all spheres of public, nor can it implement its politics and program efficiently in all areas”.

A similar argument was stated by Alm and Bahl (1999:pp2-4) that “countries adopting decentralization have distinct characteristics, such as:

a). Countries that have large populations and land areas (e.g. the US, Canada, Australia, Germany, Russia, Nigeria, India, Brazil, and Argentina) tend to be more decentralized.

b). Countries that have diverse populations tend to be more decentralized in order to accommodate regional differences in preferences for services, and/or to hold potentially divided country together by providing appeasement via some degree of regional autonomy to potential breakaway regions.

c). Countries that have achieved a higher level of economic development tend to be more decentralized.”

For East Asia countries, decentralization has become a fundamental transformation in the government structure since the 1990’s. Before 1990, almost all countries in East Asia implemented centralized systems (White and Smoke: 2005:p1). Nevertheless, decentralization in East Asian countries remains relatively slow compared to America, Europe, Latin America and several of African countries. However, it has been argued that decentralization progress has occurred in several countries in South East Asia such as Indonesia. This doesn’t mean that decentralization implementation in South East Asian countries runs smoothly. There are fundamental problems faced by these countries in terms of implementation, authority distribution between the central and local government, government organizational structure, fiscal sharing system, accountability and management of natural and human resource, and lack of local capacity.

**2. The Objectives of Decentralization**

As explained previously, there is no standard model of decentralization. Decentralization implementation in countries will be different depending on their background, motivation, the aim of decentralization and institutional implementation (DFID Report 2002:p1). This differentiation in motives and aims will affect the policy priorities taken by the government. In developed countries, decentralization is more encouraged by the existence of democratic demands to realize good governance.

The complexity of factors behind the demand for decentralization basically impact on how easily these objectives are achieved. For instance, in developed countries, the demand for a democratic process and good governance indicates that decentralization was executed to realize accountability, transparency, and citizen participation principles. In developing countries on the other hand, decentralization is more related to economic development, and aims to reduce poverty and to realize sustainable development.

Although the aims of decentralization appear different in every nation, decentralization is seen to have universal aims stressed differently in every nation. Manor (1999: p37) suggests that decentralization aims to:

1. Deepen democracy by extending liberal representative politics to lower level;

2. Enlarge opportunities for citizens to participate in decisions affecting their lives;
3. Promote partnership between state and society;
4. Facilitate cooperation between government and lower level association and non-governmental organizations;
5. Enhance the accountability of bureaucrats, elected representatives, and political institutions more generally;
6. Enhance the responsiveness of government;
7. Enhance the transparency of government;
8. Alleviate poverty;
9. Enhance the legitimacy of the political system.

*C. The Concept of Capacity-Building*

It is not easy to find an absolute definition of capacity building. Capacity building has a broad meaning and in many contexts, such as for NGOs, business organizations and government organizations. Furthermore, Eade’s (1997:p35) distinction of capacity building within NGOs and civil society is described in the matrix.

From the definitions above, it can be understood that capacity building is a process of creating a "learning" organization. As stated by Morrison (2001:p42), capacity-building can be seen as “a process to induce, or set a motion, multi-level change in individuals, groups, organizations and system seeking to strengthen

the self-adaptive capabilities of people and organizations so that they can respond to a changing environment on an on going basis.” In the governance context, capacity refers to individual or organizational ability to achieve government aims. Therefore, capacity building is more than just technical competence or availability of human or financial sources. Capacity is also measured quantitatively but in governance and service delivery context, it is often seen in the perspective of how the decision was made, the quality of public service supplied, as well as the results and what kind of outcomes will be realized. From the explanations above, simply speaking, capacity building is a process that increases the ability of persons, organizations, or systems to meet their stated purposes and objectives (Brown et.al.2001: p23). As stated by UNDP (1998:p14) “Capacity is the ability of an individual, an organization or a system to perform functions and to meet objectives effectively and efficiently.

**Table 2**  
**The Various Meaning of Capacity Building**

	Capacity building as means	Capacity building as process	Capacity building as end
Capacity building in the NGO	Strengthen organization to perform specified activities (one of which may be to build capacity among primary stakeholders.	Process of reflection, leadership, inspiration, adaptation, and search for greater coherence between NGO mission, structure and activities	Strengthen NGO to survive and fulfil its mission, as defined by the organization.
Capacity building in civil society	Strengthen capacity of primary stakeholders to implement defined activities.	Fostering communication: process of debate, relationship building, conflict resolution and improved ability of society to deal with its differences	Strengthen capacity of primary stakeholders to participate in political and socioeconomic arena according to objectives defined by them.

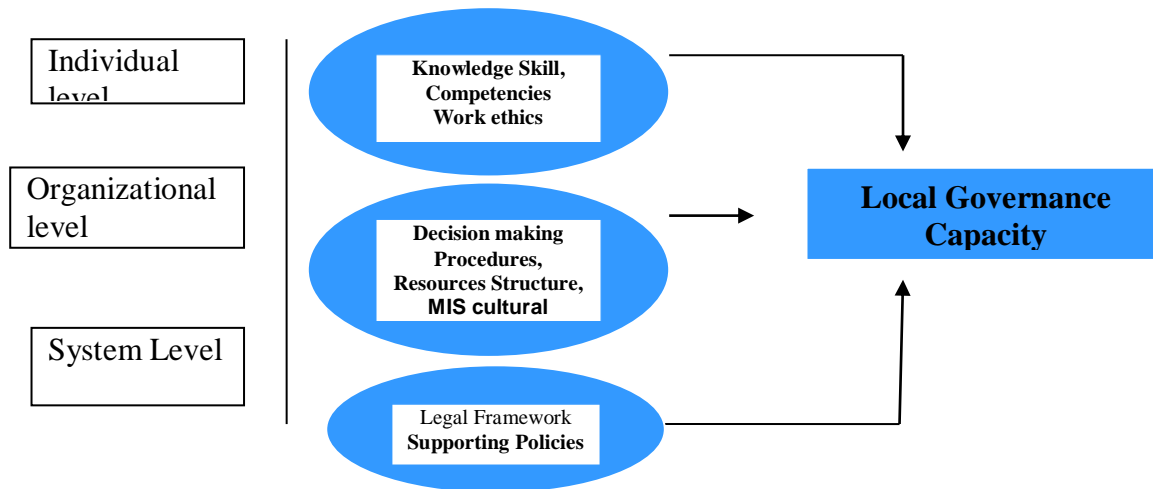
*Source: Eade (1997:p35)*

This should be based on a continuing review of the framework conditions, and on a dynamic adjustment of functions and objectives.” Therefore capacity building can be defined as a process to increase the ability of individuals, groups, organizations, communities or societies to (i) analyse their environment, (ii) identify problems, needs, issues and opportunities, (iii) formulate strategies to deal with these problems, issues and needs, and seize the relevant opportunities, (iv) design a plan of

action, and (v) assemble and use effectively and on a sustainable basis resources to implement, monitor and evaluate the plan of actions, and use feedback to learn lessons” (ACBF 2001:p22).

According to UNDP (1998:p12), capacity building covers three category levels namely individual level, organizational level and system level as described in this figure:

FIGURE 1  
THE ELEMENTS OF CAPACITY BUILDING



*D. Decentralization to Strengthen Local Capacity-Building.*

Decentralization and capacity building are regarded as two intertwined parts in the decentralization policy in Indonesia, like two sides of a coin. Decentralization without capacity support at the local level will reveal new problems and cause decentralization to fail.

In the Indonesian context, capacity building is an essential issue since decentralization began in 2001. Capacity building is seen to be an absolute requirement of decentralization policy in Indonesia, but capacity at the local level is weak and at the same time it creates an anxiety about the failure of implementation of the system in the country.

As noted, decentralization in Indonesia was carried out at the time when governance was very weak, both at the central and local levels as a result of the economic crisis since 1997. Also, during 32 years of new order governance under Soeharto’s administration, capacity-building at the local level was never realized. Centralization of power implemented by the central government caused helplessness and dependence of local governments on the central government, both in term of decision-making and financial and human resources. Therefore, when decentralization began in 2001, local capacity was in a bad state. That is why decentralization in Indonesia is moving very slowly.

As stated by GTZ (2000:11), “Regional capacity building in the context of decentralization, as understood in the national framework, refers to the need to adjust regional policies and regulations, to reform institutions of regional government, to modify working procedures and coordination mechanism, to increase the skills and qualifications of

people in the regions, and to change value systems and attitudes in a way that meets the demands and needs of regional autonomy as new approach toward governing and administering.”

Hence, it is understandable that capacity-building in Indonesia is placed within a national framework to: (1) better define the overall capacity-building needs of central government agencies, regional government, supporting institutions, civil society organizations, and the communities to successfully implement decentralization; (2) identify and define priorities (especially between sectors) for capacity building initiatives; (3) establish an overall implementation plan for capacity building initiatives that is coordinated and efficient; and (4) provide reference for the government to use allocating development funds on supporting the implementation on regional autonomy and in making request to donor agencies for support (CGI meeting,2001:17).

Furthermore as suggested by UNDP, capacity building in the context of regional autonomy has to include and address three levels of intervention in order to be effective and sustainable in Indonesia, namely :

1. The system level i.e. the regulatory framework and policies that support or hamper the achievement of certain policy objectives;
2. The institutional or entity level, i.e. the structure of organization, the decision making process within organizations, procedures and working mechanism, management instrument, the relationships and networks between organizations;
3. The individual level, i.e. individual skills and

qualifications, knowledge, attitudes, work ethics and motivations of people working. (Ibid p.4)

#### *E. The Existing Condition And Problems of Human Resources Capacity In Sumedang Regency*

Civil service reform is usually a supporting strategy for broader decentralization in government operations or service delivery. According to Tjiptoherijanto (2007:1,) the civil service can be illustrated as ‘a moving wheel that is able to empower all resources possessed by a government to achieve certain goals, targets and missions which are intended to be accomplished by the nation, for the prosperity of its people.’ It means that the reformation of civil service becomes an important agenda in supporting decentralization.

Unfortunately, the decentralization policy has not encouraged yet the local government to conduct real civil service reform. Until now the public service performance has still not shown a significant change. Bureaucracy reforms aimed to increase the quality of public services are often discussed by the government but have not shown concrete steps.

Generally, the civil service in Indonesia has a weakness in the mentality aspect, technical aspect and competence. Complicated bureaucracy, bribery culture, corruption; nepotism and collusion (*KKN*) are consistent images of Indonesian bureaucracy, either in the central and local level. All businesses related to the bureaucracy always come into contact with adagium "*if it can be set in a complicated way, why water it down*".

The image of bureaucracy in Indonesia cannot be separated from its personnel quality concerning interest, performance and also quality of individual mentality. The strength of the bureaucracy can be determined by how civil servants exist, and who can execute functions better by giving quality service fast, precisely and cheaply to the citizen.

Evaluation data show the personnel/human resources in the Sumedang Regency Government have not yet achieved optimal performance. This assessment surely is very disappointing considering that after almost 13 years of decentralization, the Sumedang Regency Government has still has not yielded a strong bureaucracy. Such conditions will affect the quality of local autonomy implementation aiming to increase the quality of public services to citizens and improve their prosperity.

##### 1. Specialization

Civil services at all levels of the government need a capable, motivated, and efficient staff to deliver quality services to its citizens. When civil service functions and structures are decentralized, existing bureaucratic patterns must be reorganized as roles and accountabilities are shifted. Decentralization thus intensifies the need for capable staff and increases the importance of capacity-building programs.

Personnel availability both in quality and quantity will have positive effects if managed effectively. Inappropriate official management will burden the financial situation of local government and can create new problems such as in career establishment, position promotion, official discipline and so on. This will cause inefficiency and ineffectiveness.

Personnel management capacity at the Sumedang Regency government is improving only slowly, for instance:

1. There is no compilation of job description for each personnel especially for staff. This situation causes overlaps and blurring of fundamental duties and functions of civil servants. Compiled job description aims to facilitate an atmosphere where each organizational unit and personnel can comprehend its duty area so an efficient organizational performance can move effectively and overlapping can be prevented.
2. The Local Human Resources Board has initiated personnel arrangement system. For example, official data containing educational background, skill, year of service etc., is made as a base in the new personnel placement in an organizational unit, and placement for a job position. In order to enhance official interest, training and education programs are promoted. However, implementation still experiences constraints such as personnel recruitment without need assessment, incomplete personnel data and lack of technology-based facility for data support (computer based).
3. Although the job description of each organizational unit has been compiled, there are still divisions within the departments or institutions that have not been filled by professional officials (staff) possessing an educational background that matches the main task. This is caused by the official recruitment conducted previously without conducting analysis of official requirement or competency-based assessment.
4. Every department or institution at the Sumedang Regency government have not yet had any standards of competence, so the assessment of performance cannot be done optimally. The arrangement of a job description should be followed by a performance measuring mechanism so that we have a clear standard as bases to assess whether the main task and function of each organizational unit have already reached an optimal result. This measuring mechanism should not only measure individual performance in the implementation of a job but should also be determined from what outcomes have been obtained.

##### 2. Human Resource Development

Personnel are one of the vital factors to the success of an organization in reaching its goal. Hence, Eade (1997:3) said, “strengthening people’s capacity to determine their own values and priorities, and to act on these, is the basis of development.” In this sense, the reinforcement of personnel aspects cannot be separated from capacity building.

The capacity of personnel competence existing at the Sumedang Regency is slowly emerging. Such conditions indicate that official placement effort on precise position is being conducted, although not yet obtaining an optimal result. Some constraints still faced by the Sumedang Regency are:

1. Job placement according to the educational background and skill has not been conducted optimally due to the existence of several technical obstacles relating to the

official's database and conflict of interest. For instance, head of health division does not have educational background about medical science.

- Generally the level of officials' education at Sumedang Regency is still inadequate compared to the work load that should be undertaken, as can be seen on the table below:

TABLE 3  
NUMBER OF GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS BASED ON EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND 2011

No	Educational Type	2008	2009	2010	2011
1	Elementary	572	489	429	398
2	Junior High School	574	550	514	492
3	Senior High School	3398	2787	2840	2791
4	D I (Diploma 1)	-	284	270	283
5	D II (Diploma 2)	4243	4352	4374	4433
6	D III (Diploma 3)	964	1046	1071	1095
7	D IV (Diploma 4)	-	17	16	16
8	Bachelor	2670	2768	2837	2951
9	Post Graduate	127	203	201	216
	Amount	12548	12496	12552	12675

Source: Sumedang Local Official Board 2013

- From the data, it can be seen that most officials have middle level of education that is Senior High School and Diploma. At such education level, someone cannot be expected to have specific skills. Whereas the official duty area from the middle level downwards require specific skills. This condition pursues implementation of 'the right man for the right job' in Sumedang Regency government.
- The number of officials joining education and training, as an effort to enhance officials' skill and competence should be increased every year. This is in consideration of the toughest challenge faced in enhancing the quality of service for the citizen. In Indonesian context, according to Kimura (2001:p10) there are at least three activities to enlarge individual capacity: 1) recruiting qualified persons; 2) giving staff more training opportunities; and 4) providing sufficient OJT (On the Job Training). In fact, the Sumedang Regency government experienced decline in number every year. It can be seen on the table below:

TABLE 4  
LIST OF GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS JOINING EDUCATION & TRAINING

No	Training Type	2008	2009	2010	2011
1	Leadership education and training Level 4.	129	40	-	-
2	Leadership education and training Level 3	39	27	10	14
3	Leadership education and training Level 2	10	25	5	-
4	Functional education and training	-	43	60	60
	Total	178	135	75	74

Source: Sumedang Local Official Board 2013

### 3. Merit System

Merit system is a method of personnel management designed to promote the efficiency and economy of the service and the betterment of the public by providing an effective selection and retention of employees, in-service promotional opportunities, and other related matters based on merit principles:

- Hiring and promotion of employees on the basis of ability
- Providing fair retention of employees on the basis of performance. Correcting inadequate performance, and separating those who have inadequate performance and cannot be corrected
- Training employees as needed for high-quality performance
- Assuring fair treatment of applicants and employees in all aspects of personnel administration without regard to any political affiliation, origins, sex, or religious creed and with proper regard for their privacy and constitutional rights as citizens
- Protecting employees against political coercion, and prohibiting the use of official position to affect an election or nomination for offices. (<http://www.laccd.edu>)

Based on the evaluation results, the use of a merit system at the Sumedang Regency has started although it has not yet shown an optimal result, for example:

- Sumedang Regency government is designing a Local Regulation that manages the capability test in the placement of officials into a certain positions. Until now, the solution about the mechanism is still being processed. As expected, it is not free from problems, such as the existence of conflicts of interest from many sides not wishing to adopt the system.
- Sumedang Regency government is designing a measurement system of working performance able to reflect individual achievement, so that competence can be clearly measured. Later on, this can be used as a

basis in deciding the official's appropriate criteria for promotion and productivity incentives. However, the officials' limited if not non-existent comprehension of this mechanism is an obstacle. The absence of standardization is rampant. Moreover, the compilation of this standard assessment is still influenced by the subjective judgments of chief institutions.

In some cases, the biggest resistance/constraint in applying this merit system come from the officials' mentality, especially among the circles of elite who cannot escape from the culture of bribery, nepotism, short cuts, etc. In fact many officials still feel that the development of officials relies on factors defined by elite subjectivity, such as favoritism factor, collusion and cronies. As a result, many officials become hopeless for their career, because no matter how big the achievement is created by an official, they will not get any reward unless they have good relations with the chief/elite group.

## II. CONCLUSIONS

Theoretically, decentralization policy will strengthen local capacity, improve the quality of public services and realize democratic participation of the local people. However in reality, decentralization and local autonomy have not minimized the capacity problems at the local level.

The phenomenon concerning local capacity building at the Individual level show what appears to be still a weak point of Sumedang Regency's capacity development efforts. Vague officer specialization, low human resource development and career training system greatly affect to the quality of a local government working performance. As this becomes a fundamental constraint faced by Sumedang Regency government, instead of developing individual capacities, the situation is aggravated by a weak commitment of local elites, conflict of interest among elites, and also a limited budget for local human resource development.

Capacity development at the individual level should be done comprehensively and in an integrated manner. It should cover a whole spectrum starting from an analysis of employee's needs, recruitment, and employee's data base compilation, position placement, education and training, and career construction, welfare construction and also retirement. Sumedang Regency government should overhaul their personnel management, organization to be more

transparent and fair. The specification of employee's responsibilities, a standard measurement of working performance, and an assessment mechanism of employee's achievement will reflect personnel productivity and creativity.

To support these endeavours, the Sumedang Regency government must allocate an adequate budget for personnel and human resource development. Moreover, official salaries must be increased to create incentives and encourage honest, effective and efficient government employees, and to optimize effectiveness and productivity in government organizations.

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