

Participatory approach toward an inclusive green economy: Bridging the gap between elite policy and local practices

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With the rising global trends of employing the green economics approach, developing countries began to implement it. Particularly the conventional development model, which depends heavily on exploiting natural resources, is failing to achieve its goals sustainably. The conventional development model, which side-lined the environmental concerns, has resulted in several problems: resource scarcity, climate anomaly, decreased forest coverage and the high social cost due to pollution and waste. As a result, poverty, unemployment and other social problems thicken. In such a case, the concept of an inclusive green economy through integrating environmental, economic and social factors is expected to accelerate economic growth and provide prosperity while preserving the environment by reducing pollution and utilising renewable energy, among others (Kasztelan 2017: 491; European Commission 2018: 4).

The green economy has become an increasingly relevant approach for developing countries like Indonesia to replace the conventional economy gradually. Indonesia's current dominant economic model relies heavily on the exports of primary products, which results in the exploitation and commercialisation of natural resources. The follow-up question would be: how can the green economy concept bring improvement in people's lives? Currently, Indonesia already has several enabling factors that may support its

implementation. A large number of people living in rural areas traditionally work on unproductive land and remote areas. Therefore, specifically designed policies are needed to convert these issues into opportunities. In addition, Indonesia's geographical position on the equator – along with the biodiversity, tropical forests and abundant sunshine that it entails – can be a significant capital for the green economy.

Developing countries might not straightforwardly carry over the best practices of developed countries in implementing the green economy; among others are human resources problems, limited access to capital and access to technology. These problems are worsened by the mismanaged governance (such as the absence of a blueprint on directions and targets), weak planning and poor coordination among government institutions/agencies. Indonesia has a longstanding silo problem, where each agency has its programme without meaningful synergy. The so-called 'sectoral ego' remains strong, which becomes one of the primary reasons why several green economy-related regulations failed to gain traction.

The failure of environmental policy to achieve its objectives was due to political and communication factors. Political factors include the conflict between environmental policy objectives and economic policy objectives. The lack of incentives to implement environmental policies and a failure to communicate objectives to key stakeholders are all key factors contributing to the inability to attain environmental sustainability.

Another critical issue is the failure to encourage participation and engagement of the population, especially the most disadvantaged groups and the most affected by environmental damage. This factor is critical because only with community participation and involvement responsiveness and the 'sense of ownership' can grow, which are essential for the sustainability and success of green economy programmes.

This paper will highlight the importance of community participation in implementing an inclusive green economy by identifying barriers and their implications and offering possible future steps for problem-solving.

Engaging people

Programmes designed with a participatory approach can utilise people with much local physical knowledge both at the time of planning and implementation to agree on the goals, roles of each actor, clarity about the overall process and the results to be obtained. In this scheme, the community is given the space to control, provide input and oversee so that the implemented projects are directly beneficial. This arrangement is

fundamental because if the green economy programmes do not address their specific issues, it may produce an unintended, detrimental impact on their lives.

Getting a green economy buy-in from communities might require changes in their current practices. Across multiple communities, people's daily lives and the environment in which they live are intertwined. For example, in rural communities, daily life is highly dependent on the surrounding ecosystems such as forests, wetlands and beaches to meet their needs for fuel, shelter, food and medicinal plants. Subsequently, the most immediate need for people is to fulfil daily needs instead of engaging in sustainable environmental preservation. Therefore, practices of logging, illegal mining or exploitative fishing need to be stopped throughout the country. A sustainable economy can only be thoroughly achieved through behavioural change. People need to understand and fully comprehend the concept, accept the concept, institutionalise it, make the necessary adjustments and practice the concept in everyday life.

Elite policy and its elitist tendency

The lingering pathology of green economy policies in many developing countries is that they tend to be top-down, heavily controlled by the central government and with minute involvement of local communities in design and implementation. The government plays a significant role in designing and formulating the regulations and developing the appointed institutions for implementation. The government also has the responsibility to build a conducive environment for companies to run their businesses by implementing green economy principles by providing necessary infrastructure and incentives. Implementing a green economy also requires technology, expertise and finance, which necessitates a prominent role for the government.

The side-lining of community involvement in the design and implementation of the green economy is often influenced by the extension of the state's authority to manage natural resources. For example, the 1945 Indonesian Constitution states that the earth and water and the natural resources contained therein are controlled by the state and used to enhance the prosperity of the people. This article in the Constitution is often interpreted by the sitting government to fully control the natural resources with the 'national interest and the people' as its pretext. In the policy design, people are often designated as an 'object' or 'passive recipient'

as the policies often fail to address people's rights to be protected and respected.

The top-down and elitist policy is taken because the government is usually impatient to carry out a participatory process that takes a long time to be implemented and is time-consuming per se. A participatory policy process requires a strong involvement of various community groups who sometimes have different interests. Here, the government's efforts and strategies are needed to bridge and accommodate these various interests. This lengthy process is often considered a waste of time and inefficient, and its implementation is therefore neglected.

An elitist policy related to the green economy is also exacerbated by the difficulty in introducing its concept to the public. So far, many development concepts and theories have been introduced at the global level, accepted and adopted by many developing country governments as a way to improve the welfare of their people, such as the concept of Women in Development (WID), which was then changed to Women and Development (WAD) and later into GAD (Gender and Development). Alternatively, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were replaced by the concept of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that put the Green Economy in the centrepiece. These various concepts and approaches are challenging to understand and even more challenging to implement on the micro-scale. Each community has different contexts, challenges, political systems and development priorities; therefore, the implementation of a green economy needs to be adjusted according to their contexts.

Generally, the problem faced by the central and local governments is the transmission of the green economy concept into concrete programmes that have a direct impact on the people's welfare. The government must be able to create coherent and consistent policies even though they cover different sectors. The green economy is a highly complex concept. It is unlikely that there can be a consensus on its meaning, use and usefulness, and policy implications in the short term. This means that this concept is neither easily explained nor understood by the people and could be taken out of the context (Khor 2011: 6). In particular, the explanations and information on the concept must be consistent, not reduced, when it has to be conveyed to various layers of society in an extensive geographical range with limited information and communication technology. Without clear information about the concept, plans and benefits that the community can gain will be challenging to obtain.

Policy challenges

Due to the gap between elite-focused policy and local needs, the community's low participation and involvement are inevitable as the policy fails to deliver direct benefits to the people. The green economy policies in developing countries are oriented more towards economic interests than, ironically, environmental sustainability. Economic and political decisions often lean on the cheap, stable and most available resources. At the national and international level, financial and economic policies are usually more potent than environmental policies, too.

As a case in point, efforts to provide low carbon energy sources in Brazil, India and Indonesia have caused people to lose their land because it is taken for food crop production projects to generate biofuels (UNRISD 2012). In Indonesia, civil society organisations have criticised the government's environmental policies for violating community rights, especially when granting forest management concessions to companies. The community's rights were violated since the government neither consulted those living around the concession area nor included them in a dialogue before the project was implemented. Even worse, those communities hardly received fair compensation for losing access to land and forests controlled by the company.

Incongruously, under international law indigenous people have the right to control communal land and natural resources. The neglect of community rights, including indigenous people, to land and natural resources often results in conflict and violence between community and private company, involving the security forces to suppress community resistance, and consequentially elevates the scale of conflict and instability that are triggered by natural resources (mis)management.

Government policies that are harmful to society occur not only in developing countries but also in developed countries. For example, in the UK, energy policy increases tariffs for domestic users and has ultimately resulted in energy-related spending that comprises a far higher share of spending in low-income households (UNRISD 2012). Martin Khor has also expressed a similar concern that the implementation of the green economy needs to be tailor-made and fit the specific context; thus it must be adapted to conditions, priorities, development stages and targets (Khor 2011: 6). The greatest challenge lies in maintaining a balance between the pillars of environment, economy and people's welfare, all of which characterise an inclusive green economy.

On the one hand, environmental policies also often ignore the different behaviours, needs and interests between groups in society. For example,

between low-income and high-income people. People with low incomes usually do not care whether a product is environmentally friendly or not, as what matters the most are price and function. As environmentally friendly products are usually more expensive, low-income groups tend to use goods that are not environmentally friendly, such as plastic or plants that use pesticides. Companies, therefore, respond to the need for cheap goods through inexpensive products at the expense of the environment.

On the other hand, the community has many local values and habits rooted in customs and culture to preserve the environment. Such local wisdom includes recommendations for limited use of natural resources, processing of natural resources in unique ways and prohibitions on exploiting specific natural resources. For instance, the community of Undau Mau, West Borneo, develops environmental wisdom for their settlement arrangement pattern by classifying and using the forest. They run shifting cultivation with the fallow period, refuse modern technology and only employ environment-friendly and straightforward technology. One community in West Java, for example, acknowledges traditional ceremonies, myth and taboo and carefully utilises the forest. They are allowed to exploit it to the extent of permission from the elders (Jundiani 2018: 5). However, many of these local values have been eroded by economic needs, and, over time, they have even been abandoned by the community.

The step forward

Inevitably, the involvement and support from every layer of government and society are the keys to a thorough and sustainable implementation of the green economy. Several cases that have exhibited the unintended detrimental impact of the green economy or environment-related policies, especially on the underprivileged, must be corrected immediately. The corrective measures include:

- (1) Consistently communicate to the community about the concept, benefits and implementation of the green economy in an understandable, down-to-earth way. This includes the redefinition of their rights and obligations in the overall economic process, for example by assuring that their long-standing traditional rights and duties are respected and are properly translated in modern legal systems. Those customs need to be properly documented and integrated in the overall economic process.

- (2) Improve the government's ability to include critical environmental, economic and social factors in all sectoral policies at all levels of government in the design and implementation stages. Policy improvement covers improving human resources and increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of regulations.
- (3) Strengthen the monitoring and evaluation system to see the impact of the policies that have been issued. Suggestions from experts, community inputs and policy criticisms, especially those related to sustainability issues, need to be responded to appropriately by policymakers. It must be understood that these policies have different impacts on different groups of people.
- (4) Identify the areas of development directly correlated with improving people's welfare through community involvement. Creating and incubating programmes that improve the functionality of empty land and soil can be a good first step. For example, turning unused land to plastic and household waste processing centres can elevate the utility of critical or abandoned land. Moreover, better land management can be the source of food diversity to support Indonesian food security.
- (5) Utilise and revive local wisdom that already exists in the community. Local wisdom related to environmental preservation needs to be continuously encouraged and strengthened, especially by local governments and relevant actors and through children's education in schools.

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