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Reintegrating Former Terrorist Inmates: Role of Local Government

By Chaula Rininta Anindya

Synopsis

Indonesia can no longer centralise its Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) initiatives in Jakarta given the growing complexities involved in counter-terror efforts in the country. Instead, Indonesia should start by involving local governments in the crafting of sustainable CVE programmes. There are lessons to be learned from the case of Purwakarta Regency, West Java.

Commentary

CIVIL SOCIETY Organisations (CSO) in Indonesia had always been at the forefront of reintegration programmes for former terrorist suspects. Some of their initiatives include integrating ex-terrorists back into society by providing them with the means and training to start small business enterprises. Although unemployment does not necessarily lead an individual to commit terrorist acts, it may predispose the individual to approach radical networks when gainful employment is not present as a source for refuge and counsel.

In the author's recent interview with a former terrorist convict, Agus (alias Agus Marshal) revealed that he was never exposed to initiatives from CSOs. Agus, a Central Jakarta native, is currently employed as a cleaning supervisor at Sadang-Cikopo Street in Purwakarta Regency, West Java thanks to Dedi Mulyadi, former regent of Purwakarta. Nonetheless, it is considered quite rare for local governments to initiate integration programmes to assist former terrorists. The case of Agus Marshal in Purwakarta regency therefore provides a shining example of the pivotal role local governments can play in facilitating CVE initiatives in Indonesia.

Economic and Social Reintegration

Agus returned to his wife's hometown in Purwakarta when he was released from jail in 2015. Dedi Mulyadi who served as the Regent of Purwakarta at that time offered some start-up capital for Agus to run a food stall at a local market as a means of reintegrating him into society. However, Agus did not receive any business training. As a result, his business did not last long. In addition, there was also no regular monitoring of the financial status of Agus' business.

Mulyadi only found out that Agus' business failed after he visited Agus in the aftermath of the "Pressure Cooker" bomb attempt in Bandung in February 2017. Mulyadi met with Agus to confirm Agus' past affiliation with the perpetrator, Yayat Cahdiyati. Agus joined the same *pengajian* (Quran recital meeting) with Cahdiyati before he was arrested for involvement in a robbery to fund an Aceh military training camp for terrorists back in 2010.

Shocked, Mulyadi was willing to assist Agus financially again, but Agus turned down the offer as he felt that he was incapable of running a business. He personally told Mulyadi that he would rather work as a regular employee as he had prior experience working in a factory.

Difficulties Faced by Ex Detainees

Former inmates, not limited to terrorist inmates, would naturally encounter obstacles in securing regular jobs due to their past criminal record. To apply for a job in Indonesia, applicants are required to submit a Police Clearance Certificate. Most institutions in Indonesia, either public or private, are reluctant when recruiting individuals with criminal records. Dedi Mulyadi eventually assisted Agus in his job hunt as a cleaning supervisor near his house in Cibening Purwakarta.

In addition of his newfound job, Agus also had the opportunity becoming a speaker for the Purwakarta Ideology School thanks to Mulyadi. The Purwakarta Ideology School is a flagship programme under Mulyadi's leadership. It was established in 2016 to introduce the national ideology of Pancasila into local societies targeting students from junior high schools, high schools, and universities and even teachers, villagers and officials from youth communities in Purwakarta.

Classes are held once a week. The school allowed former terrorists like Agus to share his experiences and also to educate students on the perils of extremist teachings. It also emphasises a culture of *tabayyun* or "verify and confirm" amongst students when it comes to sensitive information and news relating to politics and religion. Other prominent speakers are also involved such as Islamic scholar Azyumardi Azra and religious freedom advocate Romo Antonius Benny Susetyo, who happens to be a Catholic priest.

Role of Local Governments in CVE Efforts

The Purwakarta Government's initiative is thus seen as a viable alternative model to reintegrate former terrorists in Indonesia. As Indonesia is a vast country whereby authorities often encounter challenges in the monitoring of former terrorists across the

country, it is not enough to merely depend on the direction of the central governmental administration in Jakarta or even CSOs due to their limited outreach.

The National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT) does not have representatives stationed at local regions who can regularly monitor the effectiveness of reintegration programmes. There is also a limited number of experienced local CSOs. For instance, the Peace Generation CSO based in Bandung had to assist in numerous reintegration programmes for deportees in various districts in West Java, such as Bandung, Majalengka, and Subang. As a result, their resources were spread too thin given the limited number of staffs and vast distance in between.

In the case of the local government in Purwakarta, they are able to provide suitable programmes for Agus despite the absence of specific guidelines and instructions from the central government. The stigma of former terrorists reintegrating into local society was largely overcome due to the presence of the Ideology School which allowed for dialogue to take place between former terrorist and local people.

The local government in Purwakarta also provided financial assistance for Agus, though these kind of assistance should be tailored according to the circumstances of the individual. It should not be limited to just small entrepreneurs but also other forms of employment. In this way, the individual will not only be indebted to the actions of the local government but can also allow the local apparatus to monitor the reintegration process more effectively.

The Purwakarta Model is still far from perfect, however. The BNPT should work together with CSOs to further refine their initiatives. An example would be to help local governments conduct professional development programmes and formulating regular monitoring procedures.

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