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WORKING PAPER 19

Linking Values and Research Evidence for Policy Advocacy

The Journey of the Indonesian Forum for
Budget Transparency



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Linking Values and Research Evidence for Policy Advocacy : The Journey of the Indonesian Forum for Budget Transparency

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

APBN	Anggaran dan Pendapatan Belanja Negara (State Budget)
Bansos	Bantuan sosial (The Social Aid)
BPK	Badan Pemeriksa Keuangan (The Supreme Audit Agency)
DPD	Dewan Perwakilan Daerah (Regional Representative Council)
Musrena	Musyawarah rencana aksi kaum perempuan (The woman action plan consensus)
Musrenbang	Musyawarah Perencanaan Pembangunan (Development Planning Consensus)
PSPK	Pusat Studi Pengembangan Kawasan (Center for Regional Development Studies)
Seknas FITRA	Sekretariat Nasional Forum Indonesia untuk Transparansi Anggaran (The Indonesian Forum for Budget Transparency)
SIJAR	Simpul Jaringan (Seknas FITRA Network Node)



1 Point of Departure

Telling the story of the Indonesian Forum for Budget Transparency (Sekretariat Nasional Forum Indonesia untuk Transparansi Anggaran or [SEKNAS FITRA](#)), means carefully appreciating the dynamics and development of a civil society organisation conceived right after the fall of the

authoritarian Suharto regime in 1998. Today SEKNAS FITRA plays an important role in informing policy decisions and public opinion through advocacy for transparent and gender-responsive budgeting by local governments and the production of research and analysis about budget transparency and



Photo: Arnaldo Pellini

inclusiveness.

Indonesia is the largest economy in Southeast Asia but ranks only 88th (out of 167 countries) in Transparency International's [2015 Corruption Perception Index](#). Anti-corruption reforms in Indonesia have been slow, mentions the report, due to generalised expenditure inefficiencies, and the misuse both at national and local levels of public funds. The government is trying to address these issues but these efforts also require the involvement of non-state actors. Otherwise, there is the risk that the issues and problems go unnoticed by the public and the media. Civil society organisations, such

as SEKNAS FITRA, have been involved in this struggle since 1998. SEKNAS FITRA has been notably working in monitoring spending during general elections, budget allocations and expenditures in the education sector, the monitoring of local budgeting processes in municipalities across the country, to name a few. The advocacy organisation has played a prominent role to push for more budget transparency. In the next section, we describe how SEKNAS FITRA came about and developed its profile and reputation.



2 SEKNAS FITRA's Journey

SEKNAS FITRA is a network organisation currently comprising 13 civil society organisations across the islands of Java, Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi and the Sumba. SEKNAS FITRA was established in 1999 by a group of Jakarta-based civil society activists and intellectuals brought who, under the leadership of Laode Ida, a key figure in Indonesia's decentralisation policy and reform, and former vice president of the Regional Representatives Council (Dewan Perwakilan Daerah or DPD), were brought together by a strong interest in local autonomy and good governance. The organisation started as a research programme focusing on budget transparency under the Centre for Regional Development Studies (Pusat Studi Pengembangan Kawasan or PSPK) and focused on sub-national budgeting processes.

At that time, SEKNAS FITRA was the only civil society organisation that formulated modules that teach mechanisms for advocating the importance of budget transparency to multiple stakeholders. In 2003, SEKNAS FITRA expanded its activities

to monitoring the General Election budget. That move allowed FITRA to expand into the monitoring of budget allocation and formulation at national level, including the State Budget (Anggaran Pendapatan dan Belanja Negara or APBN). That was a turning point for SEKNAS FITRA. Until then, as mentioned by Yuna Farhan SEKNAS FITRA's vice-secretary general between 2009 and 2013, SEKNAS FITRA was more used to reacting to issues highlighted in the media. Moving into monitoring of budget allocation allowed SEKNAS FITRA to become more systematic in generating evidence to inform policy makers, as well as the media and general public.

The reactive approach to issues raised in the media characterised SEKNAS FITRA under the leadership of Arif Nur Alam. Alam led the organisation between 2004 and 2008. Together with Yuna Farhan, vice secretary general, and Uchok Sky Khadafi who was in charge of the advocacy work. Alam built SEKNAS FITRA's reputation among development partners of a strong advocacy/research organization. For

example, during Alam's lead SEKNAS FITRA team managed to lobby the Jakarta local government and obtained data and detailed information about its budget. This success put SEKNAS FITRA on the national and international map of budget transparency advocacy organisations. SEKNAS FITRA became known for providing good quality and accessible budget analysis and reports to the media. This contributed to enhance its visibility and, at the same time, attracted some criticism. On the one hand, Khadafi's upfront style put SEKNAS FITRA at the forefront of the discussion regarding budget misuse and inefficiencies. On the other, the commercial media's propensity to sensationalise news, framed SEKNAS FITRA as the Parliament's enemy, instead of a critical partner during the debate on the costs of [work trips](#) by parliament members in 2010, the [renovation of the parliament building](#) in 2011, and parliament members' [communication expenses](#) in 2011.

Differences in ideas regarding how SEKNAS FITRA should carry out its advocacy are best illustrated in the 2009 national meeting, during which Alam and Khadafi competed as candidates for the 2009 to 2013 secretary general position. The friction between SEKNAS FITRA's national secretariat and local civil society organisations within its network became pronounced. This development revealed that there were undisclosed tensions regarding unevenly distributed policy advocacy programmes and, consequently, funding allocation between local organisations, as well as between local organisations and the national secretariat. Local civil society organisations pushed for Farhan to mediate the frictions between Alam and Khadafi. Eventually, Farhan was elected as SEKNAS FITRA's 2009 to 2013 secretary general.

All along, the problem that SEKNAS FITRA

wanted to address and bring into the open discuss was that while Indonesia was transitioning to a more democratic rule, the national budget remained hidden to the public and the budgeting process was an internal process in the bureaucracy without room for external ideas, views, or evidence. Given this context, we can say that SEKNAS FITRA emerged from the pressure to opening up national/sub-national budgeting processes to actors and views external to the bureaucracy. Since its early days, the objective of SEKNAS FITRA has been to raise awareness and strengthen public participation in the development and monitoring of national and local budgets. During the early years, SEKNAS FITRA's work was predominantly reactive, responding to issues and concerns highlighted by a media that was gradually becoming more open and outspoken. Between 1999 and 2010, SEKNAS FITRA's capacity to process and analyse budgetary data gradually strengthened and it is now able to carry out comprehensive and complex analysis of government budgets and of budgeting processes.

Since 2000 SEKNAS FITRA has received funding from international development partners to implement a wide range of programmes. Ford Foundation has provided funding from 2000 to 2007 to support the Development Programme on Budget Transparency. The funding continued under the Strategic Alliance for Poverty Alleviation, when SEKNAS FITRA became independent in 2011. Between 2002 to today, SEKNAS FITRA has been supported by [The Asia Foundation](#), notably to implement a number of projects and programmes related to monitoring and analysis of budgeting processes such as the [Pro-poor Budgeting](#) in 2005 and the [Gender-responsive Budgeting](#) in 2008. Through mutual support from The Asia Foundation

and USAID's Kinerja Programme, SEKNAS FITRA, has been able to research budget management in 20 regencies and cities in 2009, which resulted in the [Local Budget Index](#) published in 2011. In 2012, SEKNAS FITRA received non-earmarked funding from The Asia Foundation as part of a pilot project funded by AusAID to explore ways to strengthen the capability of Indonesian policy research and advocacy organisations to inform and influence policy decisions. The support included, for example, capacity development on writing skills to improve communicating research findings on budget and budgeting processes. Since 2013, SEKNAS FITRA is one of the 16 policy research organisations that received core funding through the [Knowledge Sector Initiative](#), a joint programme between the Governments of Indonesia and Australia that seeks to improve the lives of the Indonesian

people through better quality public policies that make better use of research, analysis and evidence.

Over the last 15 years, these research and advocacy programmes allowed SEKNAS FITRA to collaborate with economists and public financial management experts which contributed to increase the internal capability for managing complex research programmes as well as the staff's research skills. SEKNAS FITRA has gradually evolved into an advocacy organisation with a recognised expertise areas. SEKNAS FITRA's journey is SEKNAS FITRA's alone, but we think it provides some interesting reflection points around the importance of leadership in the organisation's development towards a more systematic evidence-based approach to sustain its advocacy efforts.





3 Strengthening Value-based Advocacy with Research Evidence and Analysis

Organisations and networks are constantly evolving structures. In some contexts, necessary social change emerges out of a crisis. The previous stage, in this way, is a crucial process that leads to a turning point for a more sustainable system. It was not an easy time for SEKNAS FITRA when Yuna Farhan was elected secretary general in 2009. Erman Rahman, the Asia Foundation's Senior Director for Programs in Indonesia, noted that: "Yuna became Secretary General in such a difficult condition [...] The challenge to consolidate the organization was considerable. When Yuna started [as Secretary General], SEKNAS FITRA struggled with organizational capability."

A first important step in the Farhan tenure was to establish SEKNAS FITRA's national council, which strengthened its legal footing compared to its early years during which, as a network, it had no legal status. Reflecting on SEKNAS FITRA's experiences, Farhan put considerable effort into developing the organisation's standard management and

finance operational procedures. "For the first time, the organisation had a salary standard, compared to before when we worked mainly based on willingness with very little pay," he said, "Like a student organisation, basically."

With stronger management systems, SEKNAS FITRA was able to handle three to five parallel policy advocacy programmes at any point in time. It was during this period that FITRA's management realised that advocacy without a strong research and data analysis foundation does not lead to profound policy changes. Between 2009 and 2013, SEKNAS FITRA was able to attract more funding for its programmes and manage up to nine programmes per year with a constant increase in funding allocated to conduct research and analysis. "We started to carry out valid research involving local partners and applying more rigorous research methods," Farhan recalled, "This was the result of our own realisation that we wanted to move on from 'reactive' advocacy work. We used to react when budgetary

issues were highlighted in the parliament, we used to only look up numbers after the issue had appeared. We realised then that if we were to continue doing so, our advocacy would not progress further.”

Rahman claimed. “Indirectly, this led to the Ministry of Home Affairs issuing several instructions regarding bansos. I would say this was triggered by SEKNAS FITRA raising the issue.”

SEKNAS FITRA’s first rigorous policy research programme was the [Local Budget Index](#) funded by the Asia Foundation in 2011. The Local Budget Index helped SEKNAS FITRA strengthen its research capacity. “In terms of knowledge to policy, I would say FITRA’s national secretariat was instrumental in raising critical issues. [The Social Aid](#) (Bansos; Saragih, 2011)¹ which is known to be used in the interests of the incumbent, although based on common sense, was pushed by FITRA’s national secretariat,”

KSI’s core funding that FITRA received was not earmarked for specific research or advocacy programmes and projects and has given SEKNAS FITRA considerable flexibility in testing and finding ways to increase internal research capacity through tailor-made trainings. During the last five years, SEKNAS FITRA has intensified its efforts to produce rigorous evidence to inform its advocacy efforts and to highlight issues, problems and progress in budgeting processes. As in any organisation, there is still

Figure 1 - SEKNAS FITRA homepage



Source: www.seknasfitra.org

¹ Social Aid (or Bansos) takes the form of transfers of money or goods by the central government/regional administration to citizens to reduce the impact of negative events or occurrences. It can be directly given to the public and/or social institutions, including non-government organisations engaged in educational and religious activities. The cash transfer is targeted to help promote public welfare and is not provided on a continuous basis.

work to do, but SEKNAS FITRA has shown consistent commitment to the production and systematic use of research evidence to achieve its policy change objectives.

SEKNAS FITRA has also expanded its network of collaboration and partnerships. In 2012, for the production of the [Alternative State Budget](#), SEKNAS FITRA collaborated with civil society organisations working on advocacy of the democratic agenda in the economics and finance sector, namely the members of the [Civil Society Coalition for Welfare-Based State Budget](#). The Alternative State Budget report was peer reviewed by then lecturer Ahmad Erani Yustika from Universitas Brawijaya, currently the Director General of the Development and Empowerment of Rural Society, Ministry of Rural Areas.

For Kharisma Nugroho, who leads the Knowledge Production and Intermediation component of KSI, the change of perception on SEKNAS FITRA among knowledge sector actors is significant: “They are now no longer considered an enemy by the Parliament. If the Head of the Parliament wants to dispute a national budget proposal, s/he needs SEKNAS FITRA’s [Budget Supplement brief](#).”

SEKNAS FITRA’s reputation as an evidence-based advocacy organisation is derived from and is contributing to a more systematic use of ‘research as ammunition’, as its management expressed. Evidence ammunition is needed to advocate for budget transparency but less so as a way to embed research in its organisational culture or of systematic use of evidence. The task, according to the previous and current management, is to consolidate a policy agenda with its partners. The interviews and meetings conducted to produce this paper have showed that there seems to be a need among members of the SEKNAS FITRA network to better define the meaning of evidence-based advocacy. As mentioned by Farhan, “Every year it seems to me like we conduct budget analysis and bring it to the Parliament. However, we have never done this comprehensively, neither have we carried out a study on the totality of the budgeting sector/process in Indonesia.” The issues that SEKNAS FITRA focuses on are indeed programmatic, which calls for a more long-term vision regarding policy reform. Farhan adds: “We can produce impressive numbers and graphs, but we do not know yet which policy issues to prioritise.”





4 SEKNAS FITRA Today

Yenny Sucipto was elected as Secretary General of SEKNAS FITRA in 2013. She is the first woman to hold this role and was elected through a more streamlined process put in place under Farhan's leadership. Yenny Sucipto joined FITRA in 2003 and has been involved in various research activities. After her election in 2013 as Secretary General she established some new research positions to support Fitra's movement and knowledge production. Apung Widadi, who came from [Indonesian Corruption Watch](#) and was hired to lead SEKNAS FITRA's advocacy work; Yenti Nurhidayat, former staff of the [National Commission on Violence against Women](#) was hired to manage the data analysis and publication work and process; Misbah Hasan who was hired as research manager. The current SEKNAS FITRA management continues to use data analysis as a source of evidence to back up advocacy messages. At the same time, there is a strategy in place to develop a more even capacity in using evidence for advocacy between local organisations under FITRA. For example, "In 2013 FITRA established the [Budget Resource Centre](#) as its centre for budget information. In this process, only three local organisations within the FITRA network [SIJAR] were involved "This shows an imbalance of

capacity in SIJAR, therefore since 2015, FITRA as the national secretariat has begun building SIJAR capacity, established an integrated system of database, research, and advocacy," said Nurhidayat, "We want to motivate SIJAR to achieve a closer relationship with the national secretariat. The Budget Resource Centre also helps to strengthen our ammunition, our data. That's why we are tidying up data management on a national level, so that local organisations can access the data directly."

Weekly management meetings in SEKNAS FITRA are now carried out with the objective to ensure collaboration between the teams in charge of data analysis, knowledge production and advocacy planning. As an example of improved coordination within SEKNAS FITRA, when SEKNAS FITRA is ready to issue a press release, the secretary general and programme managers meet. In the same way, the research manager prepares the data, and the advocacy manager suggests how to analyse the data. "We don't speak if we don't have evidence that supports our claim," said Widadi. "There are no baseless accusations, hence no criminalisation. That is what Yenny puts forth." One of the benefits of this modus operandi is the credibility acquired

by SEKNAS FITRA, which means that the management of SEKNAS FITRA can speak out about budgeting issues without compromising the relationship built with the Government. Widadi elaborates that FITRA today only criticises the government on subjects it has evidence on. “We don’t attack people personally or politically,” he added.

SEKNAS FITRA has grown and expanded beyond its network members. It is a member of the [Open Government Coalition](#) and leads the open budget working group alongside [the Ministry of Finance](#). SEKNAS FITRA has also launched [the Budget Portal](#) in cooperation with the Ministry of Finance and the Ford Foundation, and has tried creative ways to communicate the programme to its stakeholders. It has cooperated with mainstream publisher Gramedia to print the Alternative State Budget book, which has been ordered in the dozens by Universitas Indonesia lecturers. The [launching](#) of the Budget Portal and Constitutional State Budget book was conducted in the Taman Ismail Marzuki theatre. Nurhidayat claims that artists are effective in grounding heavy topics into issues that are relatable to the public. The reputation of SEKNAS FITRA has been developed over time and is the result of investing in the organisation’s capacity to produce more and better research and analysis. This evidence has led to policy engagement and likewise has resulted in greater impact. Two cases are highlighted here to illustrate this engagement.

4.1 Encouraging a transparent, accountable and gender responsive local governance through the Local Budget Index

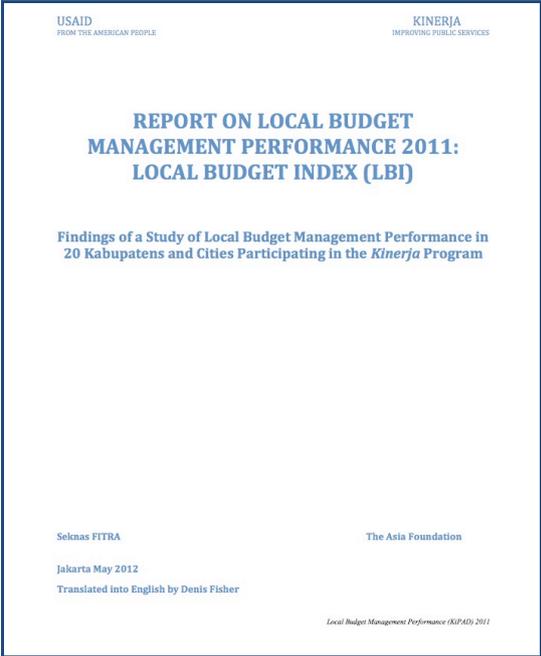
SEKNAS FITRA started to conduct a biannual assessment of local government budget Management in 2009. This performance assessment was implemented based on four aspects of good governance: transparency, participation, accountability, and gender equality. Research and analysis covers the budgetary stages of planning, budget approval, implementation, and accountability. The results of the analysis are compiled in a Local Budget Index which scores local governments in these four aspects of good governance.² In 2009 SEKNAS FITRA conducted the analysis in 42 regions, while in 2011 and 2014 it was carried out in 20 regions. The latest analysis has been conducted in 2016 and this involved 70 regions.

In terms of transparency SEKNAS FITRA’s team assesses the accessibility of documents such the local development plans and local budget documents (e.g. line agencies budgets). With regard to participation, the analysis refers to the degree of participation into the planning and budgeting process by women and marginalised groups. In the third area, accountability, SEKNAS FITRA assesses the adherence of the Local Government Finance Report to the directives issued by the Supreme Audit Agency (BPK). The fourth area of analysis refers to gender equality and the use by local governments of gender analysis when drafting the development plans and budgets.

² See for example: R. Alam Surya Putra and Yuna Farhan (2011). Sub-National Budget Index: Measuring the Performance of 42 Local Governments in Indonesia in Budget Management Processes, Jakarta : The Asia Foudnation and Seknas FITRA. Available at: <http://www.internationalbudget.org/wp-content/uploads/Indonesian-Local-Budget-Management-Transparency-Index.pdf>

The research and analysis which started in 2011 of the Local Budget Index has allowed SEKNAS FITRA to generate solid evidence to support its advocacy efforts towards more transparent and inclusive local development budgets. More specifically, through the Local Budget Index analysis and research, SEKNAS FITRA has contributed to accelerate the implementation of Law No. 14 of 2008 on Public Information. SEKNAS FITRA work has also contributed to the publication in 2012 by the Ministry of Home Affairs of the Instruction No. 188.52/1797/SJ/2012 on Transparency Improvements in Budget Management. This Instruction helps local governments to make plans and budgets available to the public and describe ways to resolve more quickly disputes about access to information on local development budgets.

Figure 2 - Local Budget Index 2012



Source: [SEKNAS FITRA](#)

The research activities required to develop the Local Budget Index also contributed in strengthening participation and inclusion in the budgeting process. For example, the local government of Banda Aceh and Bener Meriah have successfully undertaken gender sensitive Development Planning Consensus (Musyawarah Perencanaan Pembangunan— Musrenbang) or the Women Action Plan Consensus (Musyawarah Rencana Aksi Kaum Perempuan--Musrena). This has inspired other 13 districts or municipalities where the Local Budget Index has taken place to adopt the Musrena and fund them through the local budget.³

With regard to gender equality in the budgeting process and the development of a gender sensitive local development budget, the research and analysis conducted for the Local Budget Index has contributed to the development of the Permendagri Guidelines in 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017⁴ which explicitly require local governments to form a Gender Mainstreaming Working Group with representatives of line agencies and, if necessary, organise trainings of staff on specific gender analysis tools (such as Gender Analysis Pathway and the Gender Budget Statement) required to prepare gender-responsive work plans and budgets.

4.2 Pushing for open data

SEKNAS FITRA strives for an open budget portal accessible for the general Indonesian public, through which they can obtain friendly information on the state’s finances.

³ Kabupaten Kendal and Surakarta (Central Java), Kabupaten Malang, Kabupaten. Bojonegoro, Kota Probolinggo, and Kabupaten Bondowoso (East Java), Kabupaten Barru and Kabupaten Bone (South Sulawesi), Kabupaten Polewali (South West), Singkawang, Kabupaten Sekadau, and Kabupaten Melawi (Kalimantan Barat).

⁴ See Permendagri 27 of 2013 on Guidelines for the preparation of the 2014 budget; Permendagri 52 of 2015 on for the preparation of the 2016 budget, and Permendagri 31 of 2016 on Guidelines for the preparation of the 2017 budget. While the gender analysis tool that is used namely Gender Analysis Pathway (GAP) and the Gender Budget Statement (GBS).

This year, SEKNAS FITRA was one step close to realise this objective. On 14 September 2016, the Minister of Finance Mardiasmo formalised the Indonesian State Budget Data Portal (Portal Data APBN Indonesia) in a soft launching at the Danaphala building, Ministry of Finance. This event was a culmination of multistakeholder effort in which SEKNAS FITRA was involved, and in fact has been an initiative SEKNAS FITRA has been striving for since 2008. Through the Local Budget Index, SEKNAS FITRA identified that the national and local government is not yet transparent with their budget. Although still a prototype, the State Budget Data Portal proved Government of Indonesia's commitment to strengthen transparency in the governance of state budget.

Continuing this initiative, in 2014 SEKNAS FITRA decided to build a budget data portal to resolve issues of inaccessibility. Supported by HIVOS and Ford Foundation, SEKNAS

FITRA has established and developed the budget Portal Info (www.info-anggaran.com). This portal publishes state budget data from municipalities and cities all over Indonesia that SEKNAS FITRA was able to collect in several years. Analysis and studies that SEKNAS FITRA carried out as well as technical information regarding budget planning and allocation are communicated through glossary, video, infographic, and games. The portal was received well by SEKNAS FITRA stakeholders, indicated by a dedicated slot for SEKNAS FITRA's Budget Portal Info at the Civil Society and Media Forum in Bali, the 2015 Open Government Partnership Summit in Mexico, and the 2016 Civil Society Forum in Barcelona. SEKNAS FITRA plans to continue its fight for more open access to state budget in Indonesia, particularly by aligning itself with the Open Government Indonesia.



5 Conclusion

The story of the evolution and development of SEKNAS FITRA shows how it has become the leading organisation on budget transparency and accountability in Indonesia. As it continues to evolve, it is testing new and innovative ways to achieve its ideals “to become a capable, credible and influential research and advocacy organisation, effectively promoting greater realisation of popular sovereignty over public budgeting”. What lies ahead for SEKNAS FITRA as an organisation and a network is the identification and prioritisation of specific policy change objectives, and how

to have more diverse sources of funding besides international donors. Importantly, its capability and credibility is reflected in its independence from government funding and the way it uses research for advocacy. Whether producing research or communicating policies in impressive ways, they are only as effective as they are, based on a comprehensive understanding of which policy agenda to push. The journey continues.



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