

Free Schooling in Musi Banyuasin Regency

Tuesday, 12 June 2007

Jakarta (Media Indonesia: (11/06/07) If only the entire regions across the country are as committed as Musi Banyuasin (Muba) Regency Administration, we might never read any news reporting students committing suicide because they could not afford paying for tuition fee. Since the past five years, parents of students in the biggest regency of South Sumatra do not have to be bothered anymore with their children's schooling fee. All schools from kindergarten to junior and senior high school levels both in private and state-run schools, including Islamic schools, are free-of-charges. Any school-age children in the oil- and gas- rich region in South Sumatra are guaranteed to possess senior high school diplomas; because the regency administration has implemented a 12-year Compulsory Education Program.

“There is nothing very special with free schooling. Any regents can make it come true, as long as they have the commitment to do so. It is not about being rich or poor regency, because poor regencies like Jembrana in Bali is also capable of implementing free education,” Muba Regent Alex Noerdin told Media Indonesia recently. According to Alex, the idea to provide free education has started five years ago. Then, he realized, that some 30% of the population of 473,795 people are classified as poor. “I try all I can to reduce their financial burden by providing this free schooling. So one of their burdens has been lifted, now we should think about how to improve their welfare in the future,” he said.

Alex said that since 2002, the regency administration has allocated over 20% of its annual budget for education. In the 2002, it spent Rp131.2 billion or 20.01% of Rp655.3 billion of the annual budget for education. It increased to 21.81% in 2003 reaching Rp 139.3 billion out of Rp638.9 billion in the annual budget. In 2006 it increased to 26.02 % reaching Rp 327.2 billion out of Rp1.39 trillion in the annual budget. “This year, the percentage declines to 21.74 %, but the figure increases to Rp 345.6 billion from the 2007 regional budget set at Rp 1.5 trillion,” Alex said.

Alex also brushed out assumption that the free schools offer low quality education. He points out that four years ago there are no high school graduates from Muba admitted in top state universities in Indonesia. But now, 60 students of State Senior High School SMAN 2 Unggulan Sekayu have been admitted to ITB, UI, and Unsri without selection test. “Many other students admitted to universities outside South Sulawesi,” he added proudly.

Currently, there are 119,667 students in Muba, they are all paid by the regency administration. In the regency capital of Sekayu, teachers in SMA N 2 Unggulan received trainings under programs run by the World Bank, UNESCO, Sampoerna Foundation, British Council, and International Development Partner (IDP). Alex added that aside of the free schooling, teachers welfare should be improved; because education success, according to him, depends on the quality and the welfare of teachers.

He explains that teachers in the regency are obliged to pursue higher education. 1,800 out of 7,000 teachers have been enrolled to the Open University (UT) to get D-2 and S-1 degrees. Concerning teachers' welfare, teachers are given Rp6,000 per person per day; teachers working in remote areas receive transportation fee amounting Rp250,000 per person per month, Teachers of SMA Unggulan get an extra allowance worth Rp 500,000 per month for transport, accommodation and meal and they received motorcycle. “All these are not included in their salary and remuneration,” he added.

Currently there are 3,310 civil servant teachers, 692 auxiliary teachers assigned by the central government; 412 auxiliary teachers assigned by the regency administration and 3,602 contract teachers. For Alex, education is the top priority of development in Muba. He believes that development is closely related to the quality of human resources. Education is expensive; therefore, Muba regency administration offers free education to allow the entire population finishes their high school.