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6 Self Government and Development

'Membangun Mentawai sudah cukup susah. Seperti memasang baju sambil berlari. Apa lagi bupati dan juga DPRD Mentawai mendahulukan memasang pakaian yang kurang penting. Ibaratnya, mendahulukan memasang jam tangan dan sepatu, sementara celana dan baju masih di gantungan pakaian!' (Puailiggoubat 25/6)

'The development of Mentawai is already difficult enough. It is like getting dressed while running around. And now the *bupati* and DPRD of Mentawai are putting on least important clothes first. Imagine, putting on your watch and shoes while your trousers and shirt are still on the hanger!' (my translation)

Introduction

As soon as Edison Saleleubaja and Aztarmizi were installed respectively as *bupati* and vice *bupati* on 14 November 2001, a new phase in the government and development of the Mentawai Archipelago started. Now that all interim government was done away with and a Christian Mentawaian had taken the position of *bupati*, a hectic period of political uncertainty came to an end. There was a general feeling that one could finally start working on the sound development of the archipelago, not disturbed by compromising outsider agendas and subsequent interventions. Despite this optimistic view on the future, people were also anxious about the course this new government would take. After 1999 a form of development based on the aspirations of the people, taking into account Mentawaian identity became aspired. Development was supposed to lead the Mentawai Archipelago out of all previously experienced difficulties and turn the archipelago and its inhabitants into a firm unity. While this rhetoric was omnipresent, no one could actually make explicit what were exactly the aspirations of the people and what Mentawaian identity actually consisted of and which parts of that identity should be preserved and promoted and how this should be done. Previous mismanagement was mainly sought in the ill development schemes of the mainland oriented government and the incomplete implementation of these development schemes. The culture of corrupt project implementation had to be broken and left behind. People agreed that a fall back into old habits (corruption) and *Orde Baru* practices had to be avoided at all costs. So far, the interim leaders had mainly focussed on the development of Tuapeijat where had been little to no facilities whatsoever when this simple fishing village was appointed

as the archipelago's new administrative and political centre. The focus on Tuapeijat concerned people about the development of the rest of the Archipelago. In general people were impatient and dissatisfied about the way the interim leaders had handled regional autonomy. Therefore expectations of the new leaders were high. All hope was on the new executive powers and the DPRD that was thought to be able to work together with the new *bupati* more constructively than with the interim predecessors who were believed to serve the personal interests of the governor of West Sumatra rather than the collective development interests of the Mentawai Archipelago. The lingering threat of being reincorporated with Padang-Pariaman in case of disappointing progress added even more pressure on the new leaders to come with sound development plans on short notice.

This chapter tells about how the new leaders installed in November 2001 have handled the government and development of the Mentawai Archipelago during their first term. In this chapter I describe how the new leaders have translated their political vision and mission into bureaucratic, physical and economic development and how they have handled their new responsibility over financial matters. The final part of this chapter tells about how the new *kabupaten* prepared for the 2004 and the 2005 elections and of how these elections have influenced the governing as well as the development of the Mentawai Archipelago.

Whereas I have been in the field throughout 2002-2003 and a large part of 2004, data for this chapter was almost solely gathered by me by means of participative observation and interviewing. Secondary sources such as newspaper articles, mainly from Puailiggoubat, are used where they add valuable information and contribute to a better understanding of the issues at hand.

Political vision and mission

During *Orde Baru*, development gained an almost sacred meaning throughout Indonesia. For the Mentawaians development simultaneously meant to let go of large parts of their identity which was perceived as unworthy to participate in the modern nation state. The trauma of the forced loss of identity was softened when the Mentawai Archipelago became an independent *kabupaten*. Almost instantly after independence the Mentawai Islands and the Mentawaians were no longer seen as primitive. The islands and their inhabitants then became appreciated for their natural, economic and cultural potential (Singgalang 2000a). The independence of the archipelago thus triggered a new dimension in the discourse about development and identity. Instead of being judged as backward and stupid, Mentawaian culture and identity became valued as a perspective from which development could also be brought about. Over 30 years of governmental development policies and investments had left Mentawaian society with basically nothing. Future investments within whatever sector in Mentawai should thus put the interest of the Mentawaian communities first, rather than fooling (*memperbodahkan*) and deceiving (*menipu*) them as has been the case during the *Orde Baru* regime. In order to prevent hollow development that would in all probability eventually lead to a relapse and popular

resurrection, the new leaders were requested to spur a kind of development that would empower society. While his rhetoric was challenging and appealing, ideas about the practical interpretation of his vision lacked.

In October 2001, Edison and Aztarmizi presented their first strategic management plan for the region for the period 2002-2006. In this draft *Peraturan Daerah Rencana Strategis (Perda Renstra)*, Edison and Aztarmizi stated that by the end of their term in 2006 the Mentawai Archipelago would be developed to such an extent that Mentawai would be a prosperous (*sejahtera*) and independent (*mandiri*) society.¹⁵⁵ In order to relieve the Mentawai people from their 'backwardness' (*keterbelakangan*) and 'isolation' (*terisoliran*), Edison and Aztarmizi wished to speed up both social and economic development, improve public services and strengthen the resilience of the people.¹⁵⁶ In a twelve-step roadmap Edison and Aztarmizi presented their plan of action: 1) improvement of human resources by education, 2) strengthening of the local economy, 3) optimisation of the use of human resources, 4) enhancement of the local public finances by enlarging local income, 5) improving primary civil services, 6) embodiment of an autonomous, democratic, competent and mandated government, 7) improvement of the governmental means, 8) establishment of legislation especially in the field of foreign investment, 9) entering into relationships with both local as well as overseas partners in order to stimulate free trade, 10) supporting economic activities, enabling people to compete on the market, 11) promote the welfare of the people in the fields of education healthcare, food and clothing, and 12) encourage the participation of the people in various sectors of society in order to speed up the development of the archipelago (Puailiggoubat 2001a). From these twelve points it was obvious that the economic development of the archipelago was of the highest priority to Edison and Aztarmizi. However, the twelve points above all explain what kind of development they wanted to accomplish, but said nothing about how they planned to go about in order to reach these goals. An accurate and detailed administrative agenda was missing and so Edison and Aztarmizi stepped aboard a ship with a potentially wonderful destination, but no compass to sail by. In an earlier interview, in which Edison was critical about the working method of the interim government, he stated that a lay-out (*tata ruang*) for development should not be based on the interests of the government, but be created in collaboration with the people in order for it to be based on the aspirations, wishes and needs of society.¹⁵⁷ He furthermore said that development should be carefully planned, thoughtfully handled and development activities should address and include society so that the people would consider themselves owners of that development. Despite these earlier expressed good intentions, the twelve-step vision and mission statement contained little opportunity for consultation

¹⁵⁵ The Perda Renstra is a five year planning in which the vision, mission, goals, strategies, programmes and activities of the local government are written down.

¹⁵⁶ The use of the words *keterbelakangan* and *terisoliran* is remarkable, because this is vocabulary used in the much detested development and civilisation schemes of the post-colonial *Orde Baru* government.

¹⁵⁷ Edison was especially critical about the physical development projects in Tuaepeijat and the, what he called 'misuse of project money' attached to these projects. According to Edison, development was much more than the implementation of infrastructural projects only.

with the people and simultaneously lacked practical steps through which society was to be incorporated within the development plans.

The 2001 *Perda Renstra* was allegedly never endorsed by the DPRD. This was, however, only noticed by the beginning of 2003 when Edison had to submit a report on the 2002 budget. A local NGO, LBH Umanta, assumed that the 2002 budget report had not been drawn up in consultation with the *Perda Renstra*. Things got a bit weird when Edison was asked for a clarification for this irregularity by a member of the DPRD, Yudas Sabaggalet. Edison claimed that he had just presented the *Perda Renstra* to the DPRD in February 2003, suggesting that there had never been an earlier version of the *Perda Renstra* and that the 2002 budget report could therefore not possibly been drawn up in consultation with whatever *Perda Renstra*.

Bureaucratic development

Regional autonomy in the Mentawai Archipelago had, apart from a take over of local government, also led to a take over of the local bureaucracy. Being a part of *kabupaten* Padang-Pariaman, the Mentawaian administration had always been located on the Sumatran mainland with offices in both Padang and Pariaman. As soon as Mentawai became an independent *kabupaten*, people were keen on transferring the entire administration to the islands. This led to an enormous expansion of local bureaucracy. Whereas there was basically no bureaucratic infrastructure whatsoever on the Mentawai Islands, the whole system had to be built up from scratch. The next sections explain about the plans to expand from four to ten *kecamatan* (sub-districts), the establishment of the various *dinas* (departments) and the hiring of new staff in the civil service (*pegawai negeri*).

Kecamatan

Initially there were plans to redivide the four *kecamatan* (sub-districts) the Mentawai Archipelago consisted of, in eight new *kecamatan*. This redivision was believed to lead to a swift development, especially of the more remote areas of the archipelago. The status of *kecamatan* would call for the need to develop a sub-district centre where roads, harbours, governmental offices and a variety of public facilities has to be made available. Edison, however, decided that the expansion in *kecamatan* was to be elaborated upon in 2003 only. Edison was not necessarily against *pemekaran daerah* (expansion of the local bureaucracy), but he saw, certainly not unjustified, a shortage in labour potential and quite a considerable claim on the annual budget. Edison chose to focus on other issues first. But despite this decision, a governmental research team started to look into the issue. This resulted in the DPRD presenting a local regulation draft (*rancangan peraturan daerah – ranperda*) already in November 2002. This *ranperda* recommended a redivision the archipelago not in eight but in ten new *kecamatan*. Siberut was to be redivided from two into five *kecamatan*.¹⁵⁸ Sipora was recommended to be redivided

¹⁵⁸ Siberut Barat, Siberut Utara, Siberut Barat Daya, Siberut Tengah and Siberut Selatan.

Head of sub-district (camat) office in Saibi Muara, Siberut



from one into two *kecamatan*.¹⁵⁹ And the Pagai Islands were planned to be redivided from one into no less than three *kecamatan*.¹⁶⁰ The *ranperda* explained the borders of new *kecamatan* and the location of the sub district centres. The *ranperda*, however, did not give a definitive answer as to when the new *kecamatan* would become definitive. As soon as the news about the redivision came out in the open, people started questioning and even protesting the plans. For reasons explained above, basically everyone wanted their village to become the sub-district's centre. If such was not included in the plans, people rejected the redivision of the *kecamatan* altogether. Villagers in Bojakan protested their inclusion in Siberut Barat, writing protest letters to Edison, because for them the planned subdistrict centre (Simalegi/Betaet) was considered too far from the village of Bojakan. People were obviously in fear of missing out of the expected development. Moreover so for people living in villages on the borders of the *kecamatan* of Siberut Barat because the plans showed that this *kecamatan* was projected over large parts of the Siberut National Park (*Taman Nasional Siberut* – TNS). People were convinced of the fact that no income generating development was to be expected from the national park and people were thus not eager to become included in Siberut Barat. Finally there were protests against the redivision of the Pagai Islands. Especially the relatively small *kecamatan* of Sikakap was questioned. People feared that a disproportionate part of the development budget would be allocated for Sikakap, pushing development there further than in other parts of the archipelago. Edison remained reserved with regard to this *pemekaran daerah* (local bureaucratic expansion) and refused to sign the *ranperda* to be implemented. This led to friction between Edison and the DPRD and even to a personal conflict between Edison and his nephew and long term companion within Yayasan Kondisi, Yonlifran Siritoitet, then member of the DPRD and head of Commission A occupied with governmental issues. Despite the fact that Edison did not sign the *ranperda*, the DPRD decided to send a *Tim Sosialisasi Pemekaran Kecamatan* to the villages in order to instruct the people about

¹⁵⁹ Sipora Utara and Sipora Selatan.

¹⁶⁰ Pagai Utara, Sikakap and Pagai Selatan.

the new sub-districts. This stalemate between Edison and the DPRD complicated matters severely. People became disoriented because of the official information they received from the socialisation team on the one hand and the total lack of implementation of the intentions on the other hand. Matters kept on lingering until the new sub-districts were eventually officialised during the final days of Edison as *bupati* in 2010.

Dinas

Despite the fact that both Edison's predecessors had been responsible for the set up of a new bureaucratic system and the transfer of the Mentawai administration from Padang-Pariaman to Tuapeijat, not much had been realised in this field the moment Edison became *bupati*. So one of the first things that Edison took up was the setting up of a new bureaucratic structure. In January 2002 Edison came with a draft *Struktur Organisasi dan Tata Kerja* – SOTK (Organisation Structure and Working Procedures) and the promise that all departments were supposed to have moved from Padang to Tuapeijat by March 2002. Edison deliberately chose to set up only eight departments and five offices.¹⁶¹ Edison wanted the departments and offices to be small in both number as well as in size in order not to weigh too heavy on the annual budget. Edison was furthermore of the opinion that Mentawai lacked sufficient *sumber daya manusia* (human resources) capable of efficiently staffing the departments and offices.

Despite the economical design of the local bureaucracy by Edison, negative comments were all over him. Some said the proposed structure was too heavy and inefficient. Others claimed the proposed structure too lean and ill-considered. By keeping the bureaucratic structure as lean as possible, Edison attempted to keep the number of civil servants needed to staff the various departments and offices in pace with the human resources available in Mentawai. Notwithstanding his good intentions, Edison, because of this approach, became accused of begrudging his fellow Mentawaians the job opportunities ensuing from the new bureaucratic structure. This accusation became a reality to many when Edison, forced by the lack of sufficiently educated Mentawaians and in accordance with national laws and regulations about echeloning, awarded certain key positions within the new bureaucracy to non-Mentawaiian outsiders. The fact that Edison merged transportation and tourism with art and culture in one department triggered negative comments. Tourism was believed to be better off forming its own department because of the income generating potential of the surfing industry. The locally generated income (*Pendapatan Asli Daerah* – PAD) that could possibly be generated from the surfing industry was believed to be so big that a separate department for tourism only would be desirable in order to effectively organise this source of local income. It was especially local NGO, YCM claiming that the department of public works and environment should be divided in two different departments. The merging of these two topics in one department would, according to YCM, certainly lead to further unsustainable exploitation of Mentawai's natural resources, because they considered the pressure on Edison to generate PAD, too

¹⁶¹ These departments were: 1) public works and environment, 2) health, 3) education, 4) transportation, tourism, art and culture, 5) marine matters and fisheries, 6) forestry and plantations, 7) agriculture and live stock, 8) cooperations, industry and trade.

big to also reckon with the degradation of the natural environment (e.g. floodings, beach abrasion and the destruction of coral reefs) resulting from unsustainable use of that environment (Puailiggoubat 2002c). In an interview with Puailiggoubat, Edison claimed that he had not merged public works with environment, but with infrastructure. This news was considered even more worrisome because, if true, it would imply that Edison had not included the care for the environment in the draft SOTK altogether. Edison suggested that Puailiggoubat probably received a copy of an earlier draft and promised to provide Puailiggoubat with the latest draft version of the SOTK. Unfortunately Edison failed to send Puailiggoubat this copy after which YCM and Puailiggoubat decided to publish the draft version of the SOTK they claimed to have received from the DPRD and which probably suited them best. After that the public was never informed again about the proper version of the draft SOTK; at least not by Puailiggoubat.

Only in February 2003 Edison presented a rewritten SOTK to the DPRD. In this meeting only 13 of the 20 DPRD members were present. The other members were simply absent without notice. Despite the fact that only two-thirds of the DPRD members were present during this meeting and the fact that Edison missed out on new national regulations with regard to echeloning effective since the beginning of 2003, the DPRD approved of this SOTK after two changes were made. Whereas the proposed bureaucratic structure was considered too heavy by the PDI-P fraction and Yudas Sabaggalet in particular, the number of departments was reduced from ten to nine and the number of offices from nine to eight. In the final draft the Department of Public Works and Environment is replaced by that of Infrastructure. As was already feared by YCM in an earlier stage, the environment disappeared from the political agenda altogether. The Department of Transportation became an independent department apart from tourism, art and culture. Remarkable was the addition of mining to the former Department of Industry and Trade as to my knowledge there are no mining activities in Mentawai.

Together with the approved SOTK, the various departments and offices, some of which were still operating from Padang, could now finally transfer to Tuapeijat permanently.

DPRD

Right after the inauguration of Edison in late 2001, local parliament, quite like the local government, was still operating from Padang. Unwilling to move to Tuapeijat where facilities and residencies were still under construction, members of the DPRD lingered around in Padang and were thus almost never present in Mentawai. The people persistently criticised this absence of their government in Mentawai. In the beginning of 2002, youth and student organisation *Forum Pemuda* (FORPEM) suggested the DPRD to step down from power if its members would continue their aimless hanging around in Padang. Members of the DPRD were furthermore accused of staying over in expensive hotels in the company of paid women, spending too much time on the establishment of all kinds of personal businesses and unnecessary prolonged stays in their home villages under the guise of a work assignment. A member of the DPRD Sumatra Barat suggested that members of the local parliament in Mentawai had probably understood their seating within that parliament as an opportunity to improve their personal fate rather than that of

their constituencies. He furthermore stated that one should not only vote for parliament, but that both the people and local NGOs should keep the elected members accountable.

But despite the critical voices from the community and various local NGOs, local parliament remained in Padang, busying themselves mainly with *studi banding* (literally: comparative studies; field trips to other regions in Indonesia and even abroad (Malaysia, Europe, Australia) in order to exchange information and ideas with regard to business, industry and investment). The DPRD simply ignored the comments from both the community and the NGOs alike. The influence of local NGOs, whatever influential power local NGOs might have had in the past, was eroded by the drain of their staff. As soon as Mentawai became an independent *kabupaten*, local people including NGO staff en masse applied for a paid position within that new bureaucratic structure. Criticising your potential future employer, who by chance was also your uncle, brother or nephew, did not seem to be a clever career move. In general NGO staff was thus holding back its potentially critical comments if they had any to begin with.

However, in February 2003, right after Edison presented the revised SOTK, Bakri Tasirebbeb, chairman of Islamic Badan Musyawarah Masyarakat Mentawai (BM3), came with a statement in which he accused the local government of sukuism (the designation of members of one's own clan as more important than members of other clans), the prioritising of Christian Mentawaians over Islamic Mentawaians and money politics. Signed by eleven other local organisations affiliated with BM3, the statement required the complete government to step down from power because of the immense mess they had made. Never present in Mentawai, almost never attending office and not willing to give openness about their salaries and additional payments, the members of parliament in particular were targeted by Bakri's statement (Puailigoubbat 18/11).

Whether or not Bakri's statement had any influence on the course of events, Edison inaugurated the new DPRD office (the old one being burned down while still under construction in 2001) in Tuapeijat in March 2003.

The civil service

The former authorities from the mainland, almost never physically present in Mentawai, were believed to have handled Mentawai as an income generating part of the mainland *kabupaten* Padang-Pariaman only. The kind of development they had tried to implement in Mentawai was considered invasive, destructive, outsider-driven and therefore unsuccessful. The general conviction was that development in the Mentawai Archipelago would take a flight as soon as Mentawaians would form the majority within the local bureaucracy. People were thus keen on replacing everyone of non-Mentawaiian origin working within the bureaucratic system with *putra asli daerah* (literally: 'native sons of the area/region' e.g. Mentawaians). *Putri asli daerah* were considered more knowledgeable with regard to local customs and mentality and moreover more committed to the Mentawaiian *casus*. Locals were believed to be present on a more permanent basis and not linger around in Padang because they were believed not to have any pursuits there. It was therefore believed that the replacement of ill-performing outsiders with *putra asli daerah*

would empower the people and lead to a successful form of development supported and carried out by concerned Mentawaians themselves. The general conviction was that the take over and the simultaneous expansion of the bureaucratic system would bring development at fast pace and create employment opportunities for the locals.

Who is considered *putra asli daerah*, is, however, a matter of perspective. For many local communities, notions of belonging (to clan and/or to land) – rather than ethnicity – lie at the heart of their daily experienced identity. Whereas *putra asli daerah* foremost refers to the Mentawai identity relative to the identity of outsiders such as the Minangkabau and the Batak, the term *putra asli setempat* (literally: ‘native sons of the same place’) became fashionable to indicate individuals who somehow belong to a common place, usually with a reference to land. Bureaucratic positions at village or sub-district level were preferably given to *putra asli setempat*. The position of village head for instance was preferable fulfilled by someone born in and living in that village.

The general lack of paid labour in Mentawai made the paid position of civil servant a much wanted position. As soon as Mentawai became an independent *kabupaten* basically everyone wanted to apply for a position within the local bureaucracy to be established. Especially young people applied for the various positions that became available within the local bureaucracy. In the first round of applications in October 2001, 7800 applications were submitted for only 137 positions available (Pualigoubat 2001c). This number of applications was quite remarkable. Moreover so because of the high percentage of young people applying. Young Mentawaians, especially those who studied on the mainland and therefore learned to understand Mentawai as *tanah tepi* (marginalised territory), were believed not to be too fond of returning to Mentawai. Edison suggested that the extreme number of applications was part of a mainland conspiracy to detonate the local bureaucracy even before it was given the opportunity to rise to full maturity. Vice governor, Faichri Ahmad, reprimanded Edison for these comments and accused Edison on his turn of not being fully aware of how urgent the search for paid labour amongst young Mentawaians was (Pualigoubat 2001c).

Weeks of testing and interviewing were needed to select suitable applicants. Out of the 7800 applications, 450 applicants passed the tests and out of these 450 candidates, 246 passed the job interview. Whereas 137 positions were available, 109 people who passed both the tests and the interview could not be hired. At a later stage in March 2001, another 150 people were hired, but this round of applications was never communicated to the public and was not preceded by tests and interviews. So even if the 109 candidates successful in the first of applications were hired, 41 persons hired in the second round were never tested nor interviewed. On the list of candidates hired in the first round were 8 names of people who were interviewed despite the fact that they had not passed the previous tests. Something which was supposedly impossible if the correct procedures would have been followed. Furthermore, both Badril Bakar and Antonius Samongilailai had at an earlier stage promised that 60 people above the age of 40 would, due to their earlier work performance, be given priority when applying for a position within the civil service. But Edison never considered these promises.



Office of the bupati in Tuapeijat over the years

Despite the overwhelming number of people applying for a job in the civil service, it was difficult to fill the positions at the higher echelons. Most Mentawaians missed the proper education and experience for these positions as a result of which these positions were given to more suitable candidates of non-Mentawaian origin. Many disapproved of this development for reasons explained above.

Complaints about the procedures addressed to the local government were handled with the claim that all procedures had been completed in accordance with the legislations at hand. Various members of the DPRD distanced themselves from responsibility, stating that they held office for only a very short period of time and that they were therefore not yet familiar with the procedures and the corresponding legislation. Edison, responsible for the application procedures, became discredited because of the intransparent course of events and was accused of working in collusion with influential friends in both Padang and Jakarta. A thought that became as good as a reality when two anonymous letters of complaint sent to the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Jakarta were never answered.¹⁶²

Physical development and public facilities

Development was one of the biggest expectancies of regional autonomy. The development of public facilities and services formed the most visible, most tangible form of development. The Mentawai Archipelago had been lacking public facilities and services of quality for such a long time, that people were more than ready to welcome these facilities and services in their villages. In order to meet the public, a headstart was made with the development of infrastructure in the form of roads, bridges, harbours, government buildings, offices, school buildings, healthcare facilities, police stations and indoor marketplaces. Whereas both public facilities and facilities to shelter the local government and the bureaucratic system had been basically absent within Mentawai, the construction of all these facilities had to be set up from scratch. New *kabupaten* received an annual budget (*dana alokasi umum* – DAU) from Jakarta in order to carry out activities needed for their physical development. Local governments were thus given the time and the means to develop the local infrastructure needed for their government and bureaucratic system. With over 32 billion Rupiah, nearly half of the 2001 annual budget, allocated for the physical development of the archipelago, one could have expected swift results (Puailiggoubat 2002e).

In the wake of the annual development budget countless local contractor companies and cooperatives ensued in the hope to get a share of these allocated finances. Unhindered by any knowledge about constructing, but blinded by the chance to grab a piece of the governmental budget for physical development, many founded their own contractor company or cooperative. Quite like the establishment of post box NGOs, booming during the late 1980s and the 1990s, the founding of paper companies and partnerships became

¹⁶² One of these letters in the hands of Puailiggoubat and the other in the hands of BM3, suggesting that these two parties were also the authors of these letters.

fashionable very quickly after 2000. Thereafter most of the construction projects were assigned directly to construction contractors through intransparent procedures. Despite the fact that tender procedures were obligatory for projects with a budget exceeding one billion Rupiah, public procurements were often awarded to befriended individuals regardless of whether or not these people had any knowledge about constructing (Pualiggoubat 2001b).

In many instances land had to be cleared first and therefore construction sites were often under logging concessions before actual construction could begin. These relatively small timber utilisation permits, *Izin Pemanfaatan Kayu* – IPK, were issued by the *bupati* himself.¹⁶³ Therefore anyone on good terms with the *bupati* could obtain himself an IPK logging concession. In December 2003, Pualiggoubat reported a whopping 86 cooperatives registered for all four Mentawai districts.¹⁶⁴ No less than 81 of these cooperatives were in the market for the IPK logging concessions. The remaining five were established with other goals (mainly agricultural in nature) in mind. After a construction site was cleared from timber it often remained barren for quite some time. This had everything to do with the fact that construction projects were often assigned to companies with nominal or even zero assets with regard to construction and were thus resold to other companies. In this manner projects were sometimes resold several times before they finally ended up with a company that actually started constructing something. During all these transactions project budgets were skimmed to such an extent that the company finally executing the project was left with only a fraction of the initial budget. This led to the use of inferior and insufficient materials and apparently finalised projects of shockingly poor quality. The road constructed in Sioban for instance, was handed over in such a miserable state that the whole project had to be redone. Instead of purchasing construction materials from the mainland, the contractor bought beach sand and coral stone from the locals. Apart from the fact that these materials are less suitable as construction materials, their extraction caused considerable damage to the coastal environment. When asked for accountability, actually nobody really knew who was to be held responsible for which project. Construction sites gave no information whatsoever about the parties responsible for the project at hand. Government officials responsible for the assigning of the projects were either untraceable themselves or unable to account for the projects they had signed for. After his inauguration, Edison was not only expected to further and expand the physical development of the archipelago, but also to upgrade the quality of the already existing projects and to restrain the corrupt and collusive practices surrounding the projects. The *asal jadi* (as long as it happens) mentality with which many projects were finalised annoyed the public and triggered a call for more strict regulations and monitoring. Edison, inclined to put all public procurements under tender procedures, established a set of new rules and regulations. Starting in 2002, all project budgets exceeding 50 million Rupiah could only be obtained through a tender procedure. Poorly performing companies were blacklisted and excluded from future tender procedures. But despite

¹⁶³ IPK concessions were issued by the *bupati* until 2005 when the central government withdrew that power from the district heads because of misconduct.

¹⁶⁴ 47 cooperatives were registered for North and South Pagai (PUS), 27 for Siberut and 17 for Sipora.

Edison's measures and new regulations improvements were only nominal and the general public remained dissatisfied about the level and quality of the physical development of their archipelago. After the new DPRD was installed in August 2004, its members again made an inventarisation of the projects still in progress. The results of their inquiry were striking. Neither of the projects visited met the requirements, quality, budget nor the time span allocated beforehand. The majority of the projects was delivered too late, delivered partially and generally of poor quality. Basically all projects had problems with the payment of compensation for the land on which the project was executed, the payment of salaries or per diems and locals obstructing the implementation of the project because they somehow felt not sufficiently accounted for.

In the next sections I discuss the development of Tuapeijat, village development in general and the development of infrastructure, transportation, education and the healthcare system. With Tuapeijat being the new bureaucratic and governmental center of the archipelago, development efforts were most comprehensive in this village. Such was different in other villages where different work methods and different money sources were used to establish development. I have chosen to also elaborate on the development of infrastructure, transportation, education and healthcare, because these sectors of society have historically been sectors that proved difficult to develop. Expectancies were also highest for these sectors, because people believed that their perceived backwardness had everything to do with the lacking behind of the development of these sectors.

The development of Tuapeijat

Edison's predecessors had focussed mainly on the development of Tuapeijat, building offices, residencies and infrastructure meant for the local government that actually should have moved to Tuapeijat already. But despite the excessive focus on Tuapeijat – something people were displeased about because they saw development in their own villages lacking behind – constructions were far from finished by the end of 2001. While the focus was foremost on the development of infrastructure and transportation, the development of public facilities in the form of running water, electricity and telecommunications was forgotten. This approach had led to newly built government buildings, offices and residencies with no running water and no electricity, located in the middle of recently cleared land with no proper roads to reach these facilities.

In Tuapeijat, the nearest water source was at a distance of twelve kilometres from the center of the village. The newly built government buildings and residencies have remained without running water and sanitation facilities until 2003. A heavily subsidised company then managed to extract water from the source at twelve kilometres and transport it to the village. Until that time residents had to buy water at 1500 Rupiah for a 20 liters jerrycan.

Only in July 2002, Tuapeijat had 24/7 electricity supply, generated by the Indonesian national electricity company, Perusahaan Listrik Negara (PLN). PLN had long been reluctant in coming to Mentawai, because they feared never to be able to work cost-effective in Mentawai.

In January 2003 the telecommunication company Telkom Indonesia, made a start with the construction of a telephone network in Tuapeijat. Telkom used wooden instead of steel poles to hang up the wiring. Even before the final pole was placed, the first already began to rot, endangering the whole network. Locals went furious and demanded Telkom to replace all wooden poles with steel ones. This of course caused considerable delay in the delivery of the network. In August 2004, a subsidiary of Telkom, Telkomsel made a start with the introduction of a mobile telephone network. An internetconnection came later and only for Tuapeijat. Only in the course of 2018 Telkom came with a plan to install a fiber optic cable to improve the quality of the internetconnection in Tuapeijat and to eventually also connect the other islands to the internet.

All this certainly discouraged people within the local government, DPRD and civil service to actually move to Tuapeijat. Because of the fact that both staff and government officials were still not present in Mentawai, but still operating from Padang and Pariaman, public procurements were barely supervised. In this manner a vicious circle had ensued: offices not yet finished meant staff and officials could not move, absent officials meant no supervision as a result of which offices were not finished, finished with considerable delay and/or handed over in uninhabitable state. Probably one of the most disappointing projects was probably the construction of the main road in Tuapeijat. Even by the end of 2004, this road was still not finished.

Village development

Apart from the development of the bureaucratic and governmental centre of Tuapeijat, people expected public facilities and services in their villages also. But village development went slow. Village heads had to send in project applications and then had to wait for the approval and the finances to trickle down from Tuapeijat. Whereas affairs in Tuapeijat were far from in order, villages had to wait for the approval of their applications quite long. As soon as funds became available, many villages made a head start with the paving of roads within the village. Already existing paths and trails were paved with a cement top layer. Whereas most of the paving came to a halt just outside the village, a curious situation ensued where people were able to ride their bike or motorcycle to the local store or the church within the village, but not to their gardens or to the neighbouring villages because connecting roads were still non-existent.

In the main harbour villages and those villages indicated as future sub-district centres expectations with regard to development were high. In many cases, however, the construction of government buildings, offices, school buildings and healthcare facilities met with serious obstructions and delay due to the fact that local communities proved reluctant in the negotiations over construction sites and related finances. In general people were reluctant to make land available for the construction of governmental projects. Conflicts between different clans living in the same area and conflicts between members of the same clan with different ideas became everyday's business. There were situations in which one clan, claiming to be the owner of the land under discussion, had come to an appointment with the local government over terms and payments, soon after which another clan claimed the land to be theirs. All these uncertainties again put serious delay on the projects at hand.

The lack of ownership and the absence of monitoring of these projects led, as explained above, to infrastructure of poor quality and fairly uninhabitable buildings.

The Rural Infrastructure Development Project (*Proyek Pengembangan Prasarana Pedesaan* – P2D) financed many smaller projects on village level. P2D started only in 2001 and was funded by a loan from the Japanese government. P2D consisted of three categories of projects eligible for financing: 1) construction of roads and bridges, 2) projects supportive of the local economy such as irrigation, 3) clean water, sanitation and projects supporting a healthy environment such as organised garbage disposal. Local Community Organisations (*Organisasi Masyarakat Setempat* – OMS) could prescribe for funds from P2D in order to finance their local projects. Projects were mainly implemented by local contractors or by the OMS themselves. This last option, attached to the fact that the quality of the projects delivered by OMS was often very poor, is also the reason why the OMS were jokingly referred to as *organisasi main sendiri* (play by yourself organisations). When Edison made up the balance in early 2002, many of the P2D projects appeared abandoned or had not entered the fase of implementation altogether. A local contractor in Matotonan was reported to the police for the misappropriation of 102 million Rupiah meant for a P2D project in that village. He had boldly transferred the total budget for the project to his private bank account, while project activities had never started (Puailigoubat 2002f). The DPRD then forced contractors to finish the projects they had signed for and obliged them to report to the *camat* (head of the subdistrict) and the head of the village in which they were working. Later in 2002, all unfinished P2D projects were discontinued.

Early during regional autonomy, village development focussed mainly on the construction of infrastructure, government buildings, offices, school buildings and healthcare facilities. Only later attention was also paid to the development of services such as running water, sanitation, electricity and communication. Apart from Tuapeijat, PLN also supplied the village of Muara Siberut with 24/7 electricity from January 2003 onwards. The village of Muara Saibi (district centre for Siberut Tengah), for instance, only received electricity in early 2017. The fact that villages like Muara Saibi received electricity at such a late stage had its repercussions. Not only did people feel disappointed and forgotten by their government, it also affected their chances to develop and move forward. Change did not come as fast as they had hoped for and many, especially the younger people, therefore left the villages in the hinterlands to seek their fortune elsewhere.

Infrastructure and transportation

One of the most notable developments was the construction of roads throughout the islands. In many cases local materials like sand, coral stone and corralite were extracted from local beaches and coral reefs located near the construction sides. These materials were collected by locals who were paid in accordance with the amount of materials they collected and delivered to the project sides. The fact that these materials were less suitable for construction and the fact that their extraction caused considerable damage to the environment appeared not to disturb the people involved. The fact that people were able to contribute to and partake in development while simultaneously making some money, rendered them indifferent to the negative effects on the environment.

Despite the fact that people were aware of the negative effects of their actions, again and again explained to them in awareness campaigns by local NGO Yayasan Citra Mandiri and concerned outsiders, people continued their destructive actions.¹⁶⁵

Paved roads were constructed within villages and at a later stage also between villages. The construction of the latter almost always also involved the partaking of a concession holder and a logging company involved in the clearing of the trail along which the road was to be constructed. Instead of following existing trails over the shortest distance possible, the new trails often meandered through the landscape in order to extract as much wood as possible. Whereas most contractors were only interested in the profits of the logging activities, they often quickly lost interest in the project soon after the logging activities were finalised. The project was then resold to another contractor or simply abandoned, resulting in many roads left unfinished or finalised in an abominable state.

Finalised roads were immediately put to use, regardless of the state in which they were delivered. Shoes, wheelbarrows, bicycles, motorcycles and even cars and trucks were introduced at fast pace. Making use of the road required materials and means of transportation considered appropriate with the image of modernity intrinsically attached to the road. Those not able to afford themselves these consumer goods were looked upon as outside this realm of modernity. People from the hinterlands, accustomed to walking the trails to the harbour villages barefooted, now ended up on the cemented roads that became burning hot under the tropical sun. Those already used to the road and the materials needed to navigate it, almost immediately attached an image of misery and pity to the people apparently unable to comply with the requirements of the road. So, the purchase of a motorcycle, or at least a bicycle, became one of the most important events in the lives of many Mentawaians. Many went at great lengths to acquire this ultimate image of modernity. People put themselves in debt in order to buy themselves or their beloved ones these consumer goods. While I personally had my doubts about the speeding cars and motorcycles and the loud back and forth shouting of friendly greetings – one after all needed to be seen on his or her motorcycle – the Mentawaians themselves had no negative feelings towards the road and the way in which it was used.

What, however, did disturb them was the fact that many roads did take such a long time to construct and after delivery deteriorated at fast pace. In March 2004, for instance, the main road in Tuapeijat was still not finished. It was said that, by then, more than 30 billion Rupiah had already been spent on the construction of that road alone.

Transportation in between the Mentawai Islands had been laborious and apart from a passenger ferry between Padang and Mentawai, frequenting the islands on an average of twice a week, public transportation between Mentawai and the Sumatran mainland had been minimal too. The ferries, in the hands of a private entrepreneur, were frequently out of service and some of the vessels were less suitable for the transportation of people. So haste was made with the improvement and expansion of public transport services from

¹⁶⁵ The Earth Observatory from the Nanyang Technical University of Singapore launched a poster campaign in Mentawai in 2003, informing the public about the importance of the coral reefs.

and to the mainland as well as between the Mentawai Islands. Almost immediately after independence two extra fast ferries were put into operation. Tickets for these fast ferries, which travelled in less than six hours from Padang to Mentawai, were rather expensive and therefore only obtainable for those able to afford it. In December 2001 another four new vessels were announced, but the delivery of two of these vessels was delayed due to the fact that part of the payment was not forthcoming (Pualiggoubat 1/11). Only in December 2002, several members of the DPRD went to Sibolga in order to check on the progress of the construction of the ship. When they returned from Sibolga they claimed that the construction of the ship had met with serious delay due to the fact that the motor of the ship, ordered in Malaysia, had not been delivered on time.

In April 2003, PT Rusco – the company responsible for the ticket sales and the maintenance of the governmental vessels – kept three governmental vessels out of service. PT Rusco claimed that the Mentawaian government had an overdue payment of nearly 70 million Rupiah. After heavy protest of the public, Edison came to the harbour in person to make sure that the ferries would leave for Mentawai as scheduled, but he encountered with firm resistance from the director of PT Rusco, who demanded the bills to be paid before putting the ferries back into service. Edison was surprised to hear about the bills to be paid and asked the DPRD to sort things out. In accordance with the head of the department of transportation, PT Rusco claimed responsibility for the ticket sales as well as the operating costs and the maintenance costs. Edison claimed not to know about these appointments. After a payment of 40 million Rupiah had been made, PT Rusco took two out of the three vessels chained back into service. The vessel named Nade remained in the harbour for repairs.

Despite the fact that the Mentawaian government had eight vessels in service in June 2003, the ships were constantly in dock, out of service and eventually two of the ferries just disappeared. Control over the vessels and the appointments and finances accompanying this public transport remained problematic.

In July 2003 it was planned to reopen the airport Rokot on Sipora. The already existing runway, built by loggers in the 1980s, was lengthened with an additional 250 meters and a new reception hall was built. But after the Sumatran Department of Transportation had inspected the new facilities, it was decided that the old part of the runway was not safe enough to land an airplane on it. A new contractor was hired and the reopening was scheduled for December 2005. But at the beginning of 2006 the airport turned out to be abandoned by the contractor. The renovation of the airport came to a standstill and was resumed again only in 2012. Susi Air started to fly from Padang to Mentawai two or three times a week from 2014 onwards. Due to the short runway only small planes with a maximum of 18 passengers were able to land on Rokot. As planes were chartered, schedules were irregular and unreliable due to weather conditions and last minute cancellations. Whereas tickets were too expensive for most Mentawaians, the flights were mostly filled with tourists and government officials.

Education

Educational facilities in the Mentawai Archipelago have, despite the efforts of both

Protestant and Catholic missionaries to upgrade the educational system, always been lacking behind compared to the mainland. As a result the Mentawaians are poorly educated and lack a sufficiently educated workforce. Local government, much aware of this shortcoming, tried to catch up by assigning major investments in the education sector. Apart from the construction of various new school buildings and the assigning of numerous new teachers, a revised curriculum was also high on the agenda. Schools in Mentawai were obliged to teach their students *Budaya dan Adat Minangkabau* – BAM (Minangkabau Culture and Customs). Whereas many teachers in Mentawai were actually Minangkabau themselves, the teaching of Minangkabau culture and customs went unquestioned. This changed after Mentawai became an independent district. The call for local, Mentawai teachers teaching Mentawai culture and customs increased. Especially Yayasan Citra Mandiri (YCM) was actively involved in changing the local curriculum. Based on a book written by one of the catholic missionaries, YCM had already developed a module about Mentawai culture and customs for their forest school projects. YCM time after time tried to involve the local Department for Education in their plans and activities, but Kurnia Sakerebau, head of the Department of Education, turned out to be unwilling to cooperate with any stakeholder. Both YCM and the UNESCO, with their *pinatoro uma* project, tried to connect and work together with the Department of Education, but time and again found the door of the department closed. In his own words, Kurnia said that he was far too busy with political matters and therefore unable to find the time for negotiations and cooperation with outsiders such as YCM and UNESCO. One time, the Canadian UNESCO consultant was even told by Kurnia that if local communities in the hinterlands would really like to send their children to school, they had to come out of the forest and relocate in proper villages where education facilities were made available by the government.

According to many the poor quality of education in Mentawai had everything to do with a shortage of teachers and the fact that many teachers were of non-Mentawai origin. In early 2002, Kurnia thus made a start with the appointment of various extra teachers and the replacement of Minangkabau teachers with *putra asli daerah*, even if these Mentawai replacements lacked proper levels of education themselves (Puailiggoubat 2002d). But these new teachers, quite like the old ones, were also frequently absent. Many of the new teachers did not get an official appointment and received payment in the form of a honorarium. In 2002 the *guru honor* (teachers without an official appointment, receiving a honorarium) had not received any payment for six months. Their complaints with the Department of Education were not handled satisfactorily. Most teachers did not originate from the villages in which they were stationed. Many teachers experienced difficulties in their search for housing. As they also lacked a garden to extract food from, they were completely relying on their salaries for their daily expenses.

Many were deeply disappointed with the efforts of their local government to upgrade the education system. People continuously wrote protest letters to the Department of Education, complaining about the lack of facilities and teachers. People felt they had to wait too long for school buildings, teachers, furniture, libraries, proper learning materials and they complain about leaking school buildings, windows and doors that could not

be closed, school buildings being flooded for months and teachers who stay away for weeks and even months without anyone asking questions. The public was also furious about the fact that Ridwan Siritubui, the district's secretary, had apparently spent 200 million Rupiahs for the purchase of musical instruments to be used for music lessons their children had never enjoyed, while the education system was still in an abominable state.

Commissioned by the Department of Education, later in 2002 a team was compiled to map out the problems within the education system. Kurnia Sakerebau, head of the Department of Education, could have saved both precious time and money had he cooperated with parties like the YCM, UNESCO and the Catholic Church, that had already made an inventory of problems encountered within the education system. One result of this investigation was the abolishment of the *guru honor* in February 2003. This was quite a remarkable discussion, because this left many places without a teacher altogether. This made the local community in Paipajet Hulu decide to keep the much needed teacher and pay him from the *Anggaran Bantuan Khusus Murid* (a small poverty alleviating budget from the district government meant for poor people to enable them to send their children to school).

Later in 2003, YCM concluded that, despite measures by the Department of Education, nothing had really changed so far. In Puailiggoubat they question Kurnia's expertise and request Edison to intervene. In conformity with YCM, Maralus Sinurat (Head of Commission C of the DPRD) then called upon Kurnia to resign, stating that Kurnia appeared not to be capable of leading an important department such as that of education. Under pressure from the public and several members in the DPRD, Kurnia and Polin Saleleubaja exchanged their positions in April 2004. Kurnia moved to the much smaller (in terms of budget) Department of Tourism and Polin took over Kurnia's position at the Department of Education. But problems with the education system remained to hunt the public. In May 2004 students in the village of Taikako (Sikakap) were still without furniture. And the primary school in Saumanganya (Sikakap) still lacked a principal, who strikingly enough had been on the payroll during all these years.

Healthcare

In many instances the problems within the healthcare sector are more or less the same as those in the field of education. Sufficiently educated people are lacking as a result of which newly built hospitals and clinics were abandoned soon after the new buildings were delivered. In a newly built hospital in Sarereiket, weeds were growing through the poorly cemented floor and windows could not be closed at the moment the building was delivered. While malaria, typhus, cholera and measles continued to make casualties, doctors and medical staff felt little to no enthusiasm to transfer to Mentawai, especially to the more remote areas where healthcare was actually needed the most. In December 2002 over thirty people died of an outbreak of cholera in Simatalu. The newly built polyclinic was unmanned and people affected had literally nowhere to go. When Ildil Gusti, head of the Department of Healthcare, was asked for an explanation he stated that he could not get in touch with the staff of the polyclinic, because they were all participating in the civil servant test in Tuapeijat. In June 2003, the *camat* of

Siberut Selatan wrote a lengthy letter of complaint in which, among other things, he again asked for medical staff for the two polyclinics built in two villages in his *kecamatan*. The polyclinics, however, remained unmanned and eventually deteriorated. A newly built polyclinic in Bulaubuggei became rapidly overgrown with weeds since it was never taken into use. The small polyclinic, consisting of one room and a separate bathroom, costed 24 million Rupiah. The village head of Saumanganya claimed that he could not do anything about the inactivity of the polyclinic. He said that he had never received the official transfer of the polyclinic, therefore rendering the clinic as non-existent. The village head was also not inclined to take action in whatever direction. If people in Bulaubuggei became ill, he would send someone or some medicine, so he stated.

Economic development

Economic development was always connected to *potensi daerah* (regional potential). Four sectors were indicated as prime sources for the obtaining of *pendapatan asli daerah* (locally generated income): tourism, forestry, fisheries and plantations. Plans for the development of these sectors were all focussed on the exploitation of natural resources and left little to no space for small-scale sustainable development or conservation of natural resources. Common Mentawaians were barely included in the plans and the drafting thereof (Puailiggoubat 2002b). Government action to spur economic development and to generate local income consisted mainly of negotiations with overseas investors from Singapore, Malaysia, Australia and Hong Kong. These talks were mainly about the issuances of permits and licenses for fishing, surfing tourism and the creation of large-scale oil palm and banana plantations. The exploitation of natural resources by outsiders was not new to Mentawai. Foreign fishing vessels have long been active in the Mentawai waters. Their catch was exported mainly to Hong Kong and Singapore. Most of these fishing activities had been illegal and revenues almost never returned to Mentawai.¹⁶⁶ The same was true for the revenues from the surfing industry, which were considerable, but remained in the hands of foreign entrepreneurs. Through the issuing of permits, licences, concessions and the collection of taxes, the local government hoped to regulate these businesses and obtain local income.

In order to gain ideas and negotiate with potential investors, *studi banding* (comparative studies), *kunjungan kerja ke luar negeri* (work visits abroad) and *perjalanan dinas* (official travels) were frequently planned. These trips often involved intercontinental flights and many DPRD members brought their spouses along on these trips. Therefore the annual budget of five million Rupiah for each DPRD member allocated for these trips was certainly exceeded. Critical questions from the public about these practices were countered with promises about the inevitable increase in employment opportunities as soon as the through *kunjungan kerja ke luar negeri* acquired ideas and investments would have been introduced to Mentawai.

¹⁶⁶ Local fishermen had been able to gain a small income from the selling of fish to the foreign fishers.



Emblem Kabupaten
Kepulauan Mentawai

There was a lot of talking, mainly about problems and inhibiting factors, but only little real action. New legislations took too long to pass through parliament and when they were finally passed, the local government experienced difficulties in implementing the new laws. In many cases they lack the workforce to maintain and control the new legislations. Despite twelve new laws on taxes and other forms of retribution adopted in December 2002, revenues from both the fishing and the surfing industry continued to disappoint throughout 2003 and 2004.

Preserving Mentawaian culture and identity

On the Sumatran mainland many government buildings have curved roofs like the traditional Minangkabau *rumah gadang* (big house) adding to their grotesque appearance. New government buildings constructed on the Mentawai islands of course lacked this reference to Minangkabau culture, but simultaneously failed to highlight Mentawaian culture. Government buildings were all constructed as identity-free concrete constructions with plain sinc roofs and no reference to traditional buildingstyles. Apparently traditional architecture was not an item to be preserved or highlighted. This idea, however, had to be adjusted when an emblem for the new *kabupaten* had to be designed. The local government started a public contest in which everybody was invited to come up with a design for the emblem. After several weeks a design by a Mentawaian youngster was chosen but immediately dismissed by many due to its reference to the Minangkabau traditional buildingstyle. The contours of a Minangkabau traditional house adding to the contours of a Mentawai *uma* were meant to indicate the fact that Mentawai is part of the province of West Sumatra. But many found the image of the Minangkabau building too dominant, marginalising the meaning of the *uma* as a symbol for deliberation and consensus. After intense discussion it was decided that the characteristic contours of the Minangkabau building were to remain but coloured white as if not part of the Mentawaian

stylistic canon. While this holds true in rhetoric it remains difficult not to recognise the Minangkabau influence in the emblem, especially now the contours of the traditional Minangkabau building are white.

Self-government and development were supposed to go hand in hand with the preservation and revival of Mentawaian culture and identity. Mentawaian culture and identity were, however, closely related to a forest-based lifestyle, in which kinship and origin were key factors in the identification of groups and individuals as well as insiders and outsiders. It was precisely this forest-based lifestyle that was highly disapproved of by the post-colonial government in particular. In line with that conviction, the icons of Mentawaian culture – mainly defined by supportive outsiders – such as the presence of the *kerei* (medicine men), *arat sabulungan*, the traditional houses reflecting the *suku*-oriented structure of Mentawaian society and the full body tattoos, were precisely those cultural expressions repressed the most by both colonial and post-colonial governments.

Especially Yayasan Citra Mandiri (YCM) constantly emphasised that action was needed in order to save and revive what they called crucial aspects of Mentawaian culture and identity. In Puailiggoubat appeared a regular section by their hand treating various topics related to what one could call traditional Mentawaian culture. Full page articles about hunting, traditional medicines, tattooing, the process of producing sago and stories of origin of various Mentawaian clans appeared in Puailiggoubat every other two weeks.

The local government tried to contribute to the regaining of cultural pride by organising cultural contests and workshops in traditional clothing, singing, dancing and even tattooing. Whereas only few people were still inclined to go through the time-consuming and above all rather painful process of traditional tattooing, the contest invited people to draw up traditional tattoo designs to be printed on t-shirts. The traditional clothing contest was also characterised by compromise. Traditional Mentawaian clothing consisting of a loincloth for men and a skirt for women was considered to be too exposing. Additions needed to be made to make the traditional clothing suitable for contemporary use.¹⁶⁷ While there was considerable attention for the contests and workshops in the media, people felt little to no enthusiasm to partake. Local government was questioned about the costs involved in these contests and workshops while proper development activities were still lacking behind.

In November 2004 a government financed traditional handicraft centre was opened in Tuapeijat.¹⁶⁸ The articles produced and sold there were in the first place meant for the

¹⁶⁷ This problem was also experienced by government leaders and civil servants who wished to emphasise their Mentawaian identity by appearing at official meetings and inaugurations in traditional clothing (Puailiggoubat 2002g). In order not to be offensive they had to wear modern clothes in addition to the traditional ones, which in my opinion almost always resulted in a rather clumsy mixture of clothes and accessories that obviously did not fit together within the context at hand.

¹⁶⁸ This centre was financed by the Department of Education and that of Industry Trade Cooperatives and Mining.

surfing tourists visiting the island. This resulted in the mass production of miniature versions of traditional drums, bows and arrows, tobacco containers, peddles, birds and *kerei* caskets, but also of small statues of *kerei*, monkeys, fish and pentrays and ashtrays with surfboards or palmtrees. I guess that it remains questionable in how far this handicraft centre contributed to the preservation or the revival of Mentawai culture and identity. Products sold in the centre were often of very poor quality and had very little to do with the produce of traditionally handcrafted articles.

In December 2004 a government delegation and twelve *kerei* went to Jakarta. They were to partake in a dance performance during the Festival Art Suku Kencana Budaya Nusantara. This large-scale festival taking place from 17-19 December in the Graha Bakti Budaya building of Taman Ismail Marzuki even made it to the frontpage of Kompas. The staging of cultures that had been marginalised within Indonesian society for decades was indeed a remarkable event. Apart from the *kerei* from Mentawai there were also dance delegations invited from Papua and Kalimantan (Dayak). The very fact that Mentawai had been invited on a national stage made many indeed proud of their Mentawai identity.

Fact was, however, that many were convinced that genuine Mentawai identity had to be sought in traditional stuff. People and matter *yang masih asli* (still original, genuine) were considered authentic, but also as *kuno* (ancient, outdated). It turned out to be difficult to



Mentawai on the frontpage of Kompas. By Gerard Persoon.

combine these two in daily life. While many wished to eat sago and even prefer it over rice, they lost the knowledge of and the interest in preparing it. Especially young people showed a renewed interest in tattooing, but feel little enthusiasm for the traditional full body tattoo that might obstruct their job opportunities. And of course, basically everyone preferred to ride a motorcycle wearing dark sunglasses instead of peddling a canoe along the river wearing a traditional head made out of palm leaves.

Quite like the general public, the local government was also inconclusive about these matters. While at the one hand they claimed to seek development supportive of Mentawai culture and identity, they failed to assist local communities in setting up sustainable marketable fisheries or agriculture, two activities defensibly close to the core of Mentawai identity. Instead the government was seeking foreign investors for sectors that the locals traditionally had not been part of. The government also claimed major investments in education, but when UNESCO sought its cooperation in the setting up of forest schools, the head of the Department of Education simply said that people had to come out of the forest in order to send their children to school. A renewed curriculum replacing the teaching about Minangkabau culture and customs only became official in 2014.

Budgetary issues

In April 2002 Edison had to hand in his *Laporan Pertanggungjawaban* (LPj), a financial accountability report over the *Anggaran Pendapatan dan Belanja Daerah* (APBD), the financial budget over 2001. While Edison became *bupati* in November 2001, he thus had to account for the APBD largely under the supervision of Antonius Samongilailai. Edison, however, claimed that he did not get any transfer of information from Antonius and that therefore he was simply unable to write a LPj over 2001. Nobody seemed to know who was actually responsible and despite pressure from the province Edison stood firm in his refusal to draft this financial report. Eventually Edison provided the DPRD with a minimalistic LPj 2001 in November 2002. The DPRD approved of this report, but did have a lot of questions that Edison was unable to answer. Among other things they questioned the limited returns from the government ferries and the absence of revenues from the logging concession in north Siberut. The fact that in late 2002 there were still no laws on taxation and retribution passed by the DPRD made it understandable that locally generated income (PAD) lacked behind in the LPj 2001.

The APBD 2002, with a total of 142,4 billion Rupiah, thus had to be drafted before the LPj 2001 was handed in and approved of (Puailiggoubat 2002o). Only in December 2002, Edison received order from governor Zainal Bakar to revise the APBD 2002. Why Zainal ordered this and what actually had to be revised remained unclear, but did result in omnipresent speculations about foul play. Thereafter the LPj 2002 was silently presented to the DPRD in May 2003. It was said that Edison had been told by a member of the DPRD not to show his draft LPj to anyone but the members of the DPRD. Members of the press were deliberately not given a copy of the draft LPj when they asked for it. Earlier in 2003, the media had been refused at a meeting

where the draft APBD 2003 with a total budget of 157.3 billion Rupiah was discussed (Puailiggoubat 2003g). Nobody thus really knew what was actually discussed during this meeting. All this secrecy led to various speculations and allegations of corruption and nepotism. Soon afterwards Puailiggoubat came with a complaint suggesting that the local government was apparently not inclined to observe the rights of the public and accused them of intransparent and bad governance. The DPRD initially rejected the LPj 2002, because several members of the DPRD were displeased about the countless ill performing contractor companies active in Mentawai. Their questions were mainly about the fact that what Edison reported in the draft LPj 2002 did not correspond with the actual situation in the field. Projects only partly finalised and several projects of which implementation had not even started were nevertheless reported finished and budgeted in the LPj 2002. Some of the projects had been unrealistically expensive and again other projects were never communicated to the communities involved nor implemented, while suspicious investments were made in activities of private enterprises that were only slightly attached to the initial objectives of the projects at hand. All villages were to receive 25 million Rupiah for development in 2002, but only received 22 million each. The remaining three million for every village was supposed to benefit the *kecamatan* of which the villages were part. The total of over 120 million Rupiah village money to be spent on the development of the subdistricts could not be traced back in LPj 2002. Some 350 million Rupiah was budgeted for a new governmental news bulletin. Only in January 2003 a thousand copies of Sasareina were distributed. A second edition was planned to appear in March 2003, but was never printed. The 350 million allocated for the bulletin was never really accounted for. Finally there were questions about some strange budget items awarding unlawful payments to both Edison and Aztarmizi. Edison was given thirty days to revise the LPj 2002 with the knowledge that both he himself and his vice *bupati* Aztarmizi would be suspended would the revised version also be rejected (Puailiggoubat 2003h).

Soon afterwards, the media and several local NGOs laid their hands on the draft LPj 2002 causing a storm of critique and protests. Different from the DPRD, Aliansi Masyarakat Mentawai (AMM) had many questions about the budget allocated for the DPRD.¹⁶⁹ Especially the healthcare insurance for each member of the DPRD had their attention. According to the LPj 2002 each member of the DPRD had received 1.250.000 Rupiah per month meant for health insurance. AMM, however, calculated that even the most expensive health insurance should cost no more than 200.000 Rupiah per month. Puailiggoubat wished to know why the health insurance was paid in cash instead of in the form of a premium paid for by the *kabupaten*. They also wished to know why a

¹⁶⁹ Aliansi Masyarakat Mentawai (AMM) was an occasional partnership of 12 local NGOs (BM3, YPMM, HIPMIM, Yaysan Sehati, Forum Peduli Pembangunan Mentawai, Siaran Mentawai Membangun, Forum Masyarakat Mentawai, LBH Umanta, Hipmas, YLKBH, Yayasan Kirsau eand Badan Penelitian dan Pengawasan Otonomi Daerah), chaired by Raymondus Sababalat (then chair of the local department of the Golkar party). AMM was called to life because the organisations gathered within this alliance felt that together they would stand a better chance to held their government accountable for their actions (Puailiggoubat 2003e).

member of the DPRD who unfortunately passed away during 2002 was still receiving his health insurance after his funeral. LBH Umanta stated that the LPJ 2002 was not drafted in accordance with the 2002-2006 strategic management plan (Perda Renstra). Edison agreed to this, stating that he had handed in a new Perda Renstra to the DPRD only in February 2003. The DPRD had not approved of this Perda Renstra yet. While 3.6 billion Rupiah locally generated income PAD was budgeted in the APBD 2002, the PAD in the LPj over 2002 was almost nil. While the DPRD said that there were still no laws on taxation and retribution drafted, Edison said that laws were drafted, but that the DPRD was holding back in passing the laws through parliament.¹⁷⁰ Fact was, however, that Mentawai had received retribution from Jakarta for the logging concessions active on all three islands, but this PAD never appeared in the LPj 2002 and the DPRD seemed unwilling to sort out where Edison had left the money. Earlier in 2002 a message had appeared in the media that 2.26 billion Rupiah of so-called *dana retribusi pengelolaan sumber daya hutan*, retribution for the active logging concessions had erroneously been transferred to the private bank account of an acquaintance of Edison instead of the bank account of the Mentawaian Department of Forestry.

Both AMM and LBH Umanta went to court with their suspicions of corruption, collusion and nepotism (Puailiggoubat 2003e). After more allegations of bad government by the Padang-based university Universitas Eka Sakti, the court in Padang decided that they would start an investigation of the Mentawaian government. Despite the fact that some of the questions posed by the DPRD remained unanswered, the DPRD approved of the revised version of the LPj 2002 in July 2003.¹⁷¹

Corruption, Collusion en Nepotism

In May 2003 Ridwan Siritubui and Edison Saleleubaja were indicted at the court by Aliansi Masyarakat Mentawai (AMM) on corruption with regard to the APBD 2002 and on collusion and nepotism with regard to the civil servant procedures in that same year. With Bakri Tasirebbeb in the lead again, AMM took the accusation of large-scale corruption of government funds (nearly 30 billion Rupiah) to court (Puailiggoubat 2003c). According to BM3 there were at least seven uncertain posts on the APBD 2002. All posts for which there were no corresponding activities to be found in the field.

Besides this large-scale corruption case, BAWASDA Sumbar was also asked to look again into the procedures used in the process of hiring new civil servants as well as into the functioning of the DPRD itself. The DPRD, supposed to represent the people, seemed little inclined to actually control the executive part of government. It was on the contrary believed that the DPRD colluded with Edison and his partners within the various departments for their personal benefit. Among other things such could be read from the fact that the DPRD wished to discuss the APBD 2003 behind closed doors and that they had advised Edison not to share his LPj 2002 with the media and local NGOs. Furthermore,

¹⁷⁰ In a document circulated by the district's secretariat several intended regulations with regard to taxation and retribution were made public (SDKKM 2002b).

¹⁷¹ This approval was not anonymous. Political party Golkar did not approve of the revised version.

members of the DPRD were never held accountable for their disproportionately raised salaries and additional payments compared to previous years.

Edison's legal counsel, Ade Waldemar, denied all allegations of AMM. In an effort to divert the attention from the allegations, Ade stated that AMM was just a group of disappointed people, who saw their job applications or project proposals rejected by Edison and were therefore seeking for some sort of revenge. Ridwan stated that he felt betrayed by his '*adik-adik*' (younger brothers), especially the ones who also adhered to Islam (*yang sama-sama islam*), who took him to court. He questioned their support for Mentawai autonomy and stated that AMM would be responsible for the reintegration of Mentawai into Padang-Pariaman. In his opinion these organisations and the fuss they made about only minor issues in the governing of the Mentawai Archipelago, made it impossible for the local government to concentrate on their responsibilities.

In July 2003 the court called upon Ridwan as a suspect in the corruption case. However, Ridwan as well as five other witnesses never showed up for questioning. Few days later, Ridwan was arrested in Bukittinggi and pending the results of the ongoing investigation, detained for 20 days. Investigations indicated that 8.1 billion Rupiah from the APBD 2002 disappeared. Several people investigated said that money that was 'left over' from the budget had been lent (*dipinjamkan*) to several members of the DPRD and various officials, some of them even originating from Padang. Edison as well as Ridwan supposedly agreed orally with some of the transfers involving these 'loans' ranging from 30 to 100 million Rupiah. Edison stated that he knew about these transfers, but that he had been under the impression that the various departments had been in need of money because the APBD 2003 budget had not yet been released in early 2003.¹⁷² By the end of July 31 people were heard. Six people, among whom Ridwan, were indicated as suspects in the corruption case. After 50 days of detention, two of these suspects were released. Ridwan was hospitalised in August 2003 and provisionally released from detention in September 2003. In October 2003 Ridwan, together with four others, was officially sued for the obscuring of 7.6 billion of public money. Bakri Tasirebbeb then again insisted on the hearing of Edison, because he was convinced of the fact that if Ridwan was found guilty, Edison had to be guilty too. After four court hearings, where Edison was also heard as a witness, it became clear that Ridwan had signed for various false receipts and that his secretary had frequently transferred money to both his private bankaccount as well as that of Edison. During the hearing of 14 January 2004, Ridwan admitted that he used 140 million Rupiah to pilot the LPj 2002 through parliament. Both Edison and Aztarmizi denied this and stayed faithful to their initial claim to know nothing. In May 2004 the court demanded Ridwan to be imprisoned for five years and to pay back 3.2 billion Rupiah of public money that disappeared under his supervision (Puailiggoubat 2004b). Various local NGO's went to Padang in order to protest in front of the court house again. With the impending conviction of Ridwan they feared that other corrupt government leaders, among whom Edison, would walk away unpunished. Despite permission of president Megawati

¹⁷² The budget for 2003 was only released in Juli 2003.

Sukarnoputri, Edison was never qualified as a suspect. In August 2004 the conviction of Ridwan (and four other suspects) was delayed once more and one month later the whole case was all of a sudden withdrawn. It was decided that the bulk of the 8.1 billion Rupiah that initially disappeared was eventually accounted for. The court decided that the remaining amount not accounted for could be judged as administrative errors. A young and unexperienced *kabupaten* such as the Mentawai Archipelago had to be allowed such defaults. Basically everybody was flabbergasted by this decision of the court, but for some it was also a relief that their fellow Mentawaians had been dismissed from further legal proceedings. The general public had an ambivalent vision on corruption. No one wanted corruption, but at the same time people were inclined to defend corruptors and downplay their actions as soon as these people were part of their kin group. Puailiggoubat frequently called upon the public not to remain hanging in the initial euphoria of regional autonomy that blinded basically everyone for the mistakes made by their *putra asli daerah*. Puailiggoubat promoted to develop and maintain an independent and critical attitude towards the local government and to morally reject those people involved in corrupt practices, even if those people were brothers and sisters.

External evaluation and self-reflection

Everybody within the Mentawai Archipelago seemed to be conscious of the fact that the performance of the archipelago was to be evaluated after some time. Some said that Mentawai was given two years in order to prove itself capable of selfgovernment. Whereas Mentawai became a *kabupaten* in October 1999, it should be evaluated in October 2001. But such a regulation was not to be found in the official document UU49/1999 by which Mentawai became a *kabupaten*. In addition, October 2001 already passed and no evaluation had taken place. Others claimed that law 22/1999, that apparently mentioned evaluation of some sort, became operable only in May 2001 as a result of which no evaluation was to be expected before May 2003. No one seemed to know for sure. Not even Edison himself, and he did not seem eager to find out when, where and by whom the archipelago might be evaluated. As a result of no one really knowing, several parties used the threat of being reincorporated with Padang-Pariaman in support of their own arguments questioning government performance (Puailiggoubat 2002i). Among others, Parmenson, director of Yasumi, incited the public opinion against the local government stating that both the local DPRD and the executive powers had failed the Mentawai community. According to Parmenson their ill performance and bad government had turned reincorporation with the mainland district of Padang-Pariaman into a near inevitability. With this statement Parmenson called upon people to oppose against the government and advocate their resignation (Puailiggoubat 23/2)

Without prior notice (or so it was said), BAWASDA Sumbar (*Badan Pengawas Daerah Sumatra Barat*), a supervisory body that controls the functioning of local authorities including their finances, came to Mentawai in August 2002 in order to investigate all governmental and administrative affairs of the *kabupaten*. Bakri Tasirebbeb of Badan Musyawarah Masyarakat Mentawai (BM3) had called upon BAWASDA to check on the

threefold promotion of Ridwan Siritubui, who became the district secretary in 2002. BAWASDA retained Ridwan's third promotion because of the lack of sufficient education to qualify for yet another promotion (Puailiggoubat 2003a). BAWASDA furthermore asked Edison about the procedure by which he had hired civil servants. Several local NGOs had claimed the procedure had been intransparent and that Edison had favoured friends and relatives over other, more eligible candidates. In reply, Edison stated that the procedure by which civil servants were hired had been approved by the governor himself and that he therefore considered the case not open for discussion. BAWASDA also spoke to Edison about why he had not yet provided a SOTK (*Susunan Organisasi dan Tata Kerja*), a document explaining local government structure and their programme of work, and no LPj 2001 (*Laporan Pertanggungjawaban*), a financial report over 2001 that especially the governor was interested in. Edison explained that the local bureaucratic structure had not yet fully crystallised and that it was therefore premature to produce a SOTK. With regard to the finances, Edison said that he was solely accountable to the local DPRD and not to the governor as suggested by the investigators of the BAWASDA. Edison stated that if the governor wished to know what was going on in Mentawai, he would be happy to receive him in person and show him around. Upon request, the local DPRD claimed to have never seen a SOTK or the LPj 2001. They immediately returned the responsibility for these matters back to Edison. The unwilling attitude of the DPRD to discuss matters with the BAWASDA made the latter conclude that Edison and the local DPRD were not working together constructively. The DPRD was reprimanded for their constant absence from Tuapeijat. Whereas the majority of DPRD members were by that time still residing in Padang, convening a meeting alone proved to be a lengthy process. BAWASDA therefore proposed to build houses for the DPRD members in Tuapeijat. Apart from this suggestion, that was immediately rejected by the local DPRD, and the recommendation for the *bupati* and the DPRD to work together more effectively, the BAWASDA made no mention of a possible reincorporation of the archipelago within the Padang-Pariaman district.

By the end of 2002 the independent archipelago existed for three years and several parties drew up the balance. Yayasan Citra Mandiri (YCM) came with a critical reflection on three years of self-government published in Puailiggoubat (2002n). The state of affairs within the archipelago after three years of independency was not what they had hoped and expected. Despite the governmental focus on economic development, the local economy was still underdeveloped and real plans to boost local economic activity had not yet been implemented. Another thorn in the eye of YCM was the local education system. Local government had promised to make great efforts with regard to education. Especially so because human resources were limited and sufficiently educated and trained professionals were scarce. YCM stated that in their opinion local government had done little to nothing in order to improve local education. People within the interior of Siberut still had no access to formal education and local government was accused of unwillingness to cooperate with initiatives by others (YCM and UNESCO) to offer basic education to children within the interior of Siberut. Archipelago-wide people were still dealing with absent teachers, dilapidated schoolbuildings, insufficient furniture, and outdated learning materials. YCM furthermore stated that local government had done nothing in order to prevent large logging companies from stealing land from the local communities. According

to YCM, local government had failed to inform local communities about their position and rights in negotiations with these logging companies. Procedures to be followed had never been explained to local communities. It was therefore that YCM held the local government responsible for the multiple conflicts that ensued in between and within clans over the last few years. Local government had not developed any serious alternatives for seeking local income by logging. YCM recognized that transportation facilities had significantly improved but also remarked that immediately resulting from this development there should be no reason for the DPRD and the various governmental departments not to reside in Tuapeijat. YCM noted that the government was divided and the DPRD seemed unable to control and monitor the executive part of the government. The DPRD, supposedly representing the people, was actually never present in Mentawai. Members of the DPRD preferred to reside in Padang, so how could they possibly know about the aspirations of the people? The people on their turn became disappointed and disoriented and were blamed for their lack of entrepreneurial spirit. In order for development to grow from below, people were asked time and again for their participation in development. But frameworks and conditions for this participation were never suggested. The Mentawai community is internally divided and divisions along the lines of religion and *suku* (clan) crystallised and hardened.

Puailiggoubat (2002m) furthermore published an interview with Edison in which Edison was asked to critically reflect on three years of self-government. Edison acknowledged that the development of the archipelago went very slowly. In his opinion, the fact that development made slow progress was mainly due to the fact that the Mentawaians, *khusus yang masih bersifat berhubungan dengan budaya* (specifically those people who were still closely related to culture), lacked progressive thinking. According to Edison the majority of the Mentawaians still lacked a modern, future-oriented way of thinking. They remained hanging in short term thoughts and actions focussed on today's issues. According to Edison, the various local NGOs have neglected the important task of mobilising the Mentawai community towards modernisation. With their absence from the field and their focus on the performance of the local government, local NGOs have missed out on the opportunity to assist the people with the modernisation of agriculture and fisheries and leading them into more progressive thinking. Edison thus circumvented all criticism and on his turn pointed the accusing finger in the direction of the communities and the local NGOs, bypassing the controlling function of local NGOs over the political elite.

Preparations for 2004 elections

The elections of 2004 were extraordinary elections for Indonesia. For the first time in Indonesian history, the Indonesian people were to choose their president. For the Mentawaians it was the first time that they were to elect their local parliament. They also had to vote for the provincial parliament. In the build-up to these elections basically everybody in the local government was busy securing their (future) positions and had little time and commitment left for the actual management of the archipelago. Everything became glaring from politics from early 2003 onwards.

Because of outdated and incomplete statistics it was decided that everybody residing within the archipelago had to be registered once more. The registration of those allowed to vote was in the hands of *Tim Pendaftaran Pemilih dan Pendataan Penduduk Berkelanjutan* (P4B), a team simultaneously responsible for the collection of population data and the registration of voters. In order to avoid misunderstandings about and obstruction of the census, vice *bupati* Aztarmizi had instructed the 120 P4B team members and the 20 supervisors to meticulously explain to the public why this census was necessary and how it connected to the forthcoming elections. Apparently Aztarmizi had little faith in the registration event, as he also urgently called on all Mentawaians to work with the team and answer their questions as truthfully and accurately as possible. Based on his experiences with the registration of voters for the 1999 elections, Kortanius Sabeleake, still director of YCM at that moment, also called for more complete and precise registration of voters. A lot of things went wrong in 1999. People without a birth certificate were rigorously excluded from voting, while people already deceased did appear on the voting lists then. The population of smaller villages and difficult to reach settlements were basically left oblivious of the elections in 1999. On his turn turn, *bupati* Edison was fully confident that the P4B team would succeed in registering and informing everybody living in the archipelago, including communities within the more remote areas. The census and registration was supposed to be due by the end of April 2003. Indeed quite a task. By the end of May 2003 the P4B team had a little over 80% of the archipelago covered. As expected large parts of Siberut's west coast were not yet accounted for. The difficult terrain and challenging weather conditions were suggested as excuses for the delay in the registering process.

In the mean time, a KPU (*Komisi Pemilihan Umum*), a general elections commission, was installed for Mentawai. The KPU, consisting of 19 politically independent (which means people outside the civil service and without an affiliation to a political party) was installed by the end of April 2003. The KPU was responsible for the organisation of the elections and the introduction of the election process to the public. Despite the census and registration not yet fully completed the KPU started their socialising activities amongst the Mentawai public from May 2003 onwards. However, the transmission of information seemed to concentrate once more on the more easily accessible harbour villages. The KPU barely went up-river and was basically never seen on Siberut's west coast. Again YCM in the person of Kortanius pleaded for timely information about the when and where of the voting. Especially for the more remote regions within the archipelago such information was of the highest importance in order for the communities residing there to be in the right place at the right time. Voting in an area such as Simatalu, where a boat trip of at least half a day is necessary to get to the nearest polling station, is indeed fairly different from voting in a coastal village such as Maileppet, where a ten minute motorbike ride suffices to cast a vote successfully. Already in June 2003 the KPU requested more funds in order to execute their tasks successfully. When their request was turned down, the secretary of the KPU withdrew from the commission in August 2003. He stated that the commission's budget was so minimal that he feared the commission to be incapable of preparing for the 2004 elections successfully.

People could apply as a candidate for the DPRD elections between 8 July 2003 and 8 September 2003. Only in December 2003 a preliminary list with 303 candidates divided over 22 political parties registered with the KPU was published. As soon as the list was published both campaigning and protest actions started. Especially Yudas Sabaggalet went ahead energetically, starting his campaign with a Christmas greeting in Pualiggoubat. With a picture of himself adjacent to the logo of the PDI-P party he wished all fellow Mentawaians, but pastors and reverends residing in Mentawai in particular a merry Christmas and a happy new year. In doing so, Yudas clearly profiled himself as a Mentawaian and a Christian, hoping to appeal to a majority of voters.

Early in January 2004 student organisation FORMMA (*Forum Mahasiswa Mentawai*) called upon all students and reverends to withdraw as candidates for the upcoming DPRD elections. FORMMA argued that students were not suitable as political leaders and reverends were, according to FORMMA, required to solve the internal problems within Gereja Kristen Protestan Mentawai – GKPM (the protestant church in Mentawai) first before they were to think about a career switch into local politics. Neither of the parties addressed did respond to the call from FORMMA. At a later stage, in March 2004, FORMMA organised a large student protest in front of the governor's office in Padang. They resisted against the alleged interference of governor Zainal in the local Mentawaian politics. Zainal supposedly sent several unofficial informants to Mentawai in order to map and evaluate the political and bureaucratic progress within the independent archipelago. FORMMA considered these actions unacceptable and rejected in advance whatever outcome of these, what they called, spying actions commissioned by Zainal. Formma was furthermore suspicious of the fact that both Edison and Ridwan were suspects in the corruption case, but that vice-bupati Aztarmizi was not. Governor Zainal was accused of shielding Aztarmizi from prosecution. Zainal never reacted to the student protest at his front door.

In January 2004 the KPU removed 55 candidates from the preliminary list, the majority of which did not hand in the required paperwork. Out of the remaining candidates 90% handed in incomplete paperwork. These cases were sent back to the various political parties in order to be completed and resubmitted before the end of the month. At a later stage the KPU once more removed 47 candidates from the list, leaving 201 candidates divided over 19 political parties on the final list. Both Kortanius Sabeleake and Yan Winnen Sipayung, active with YCM, were on the final list.

In February 2004 the KPU again asked for additional funding. The KPU asked for four billion Rupiah on top of the existing budget in order to complete further preparations successfully. The KPU claimed they needed the additional funds specifically for the transportation of voting materials and the furnishing of the polling stations in the various villages on Siberut's west coast. Again their request was turned down.

In March 2004 time was running out and various kinds of actors left en masse for Mentawai (*turun ke lapangan*) in order to carry out some final *sosialisasi* (socialisation). Various individual candidates tried to influence the public by handing out free

merchandise and making promises about about future developments would they be chosen by the public. Puailiggoubat came with the advise to vote for especially those candidates willing to move to, or already residing in Tuapeijat.

KPU was in a state of panic by the end of March 2004, because a lot of the materials needed to finalise the polling stations were still in stored in Tuapeijat. The threat of bad weather conditions and a shortage in budget had refrained them from earlier distribution of these materials to the regions.

During the first few days after 5 April, the day of the voting, a storm of critique and protest came to the fore. Over 16,000 votes were counted, while only 14,000 voters had been registered by the P4B.¹⁷³ Some ballot boxes had not been sealed properly, people complained about a lack of proper information and in some places supervision of the voting process would have been lacking. In the mean time people were waiting for the KPU to announce the official results of the elections. Unofficial rumors said that the PPD would become the largest party, followed by the PDI-P and Golkar. While the official results were awaited, some of the candidates were fined (*didenda*) by the locals, because they were claiming the freely distributed merchandise and materials back from the public. Some locals even went as far as withdrawing their casted vote; something that was of course impossible, but formed a telling indicator for all the turmoil going on.

On the 21st of May 2004 the KPU came with the official results and the new composition of the DPRD. At first the PDI-P did not want to agree with the composition of the DPRD, delaying in the inauguration of the new DPRD until the end of August 2004. With the PPD being the largest party in DPRD they choose to put Kortanius Sabeleake forward as the chairman of the DPRD. Striking was the fact that nearly half of the members of the previous DPRD were chosen again. All protests and disagreements in between the day of the election and the inauguration had no influence on the outcome. Those candidates voted for were also the candidates inaugurated in Tuapeijat in August 2004. In his inaugural speech, Korta asked the public for their input, steering and controle. AMA-PM was quick in picking up this request and immediately sought contact with the DPRD. Korta on his turn guaranteed AMA-PM that the DPRD would cooperate with them and take their recommendations in consideration. Despite the minimal changes in the composition of the DPRD, the public seemed more confident that this new DPRD under the leadership of Korta would do much better than the previous one. A nasty surprise was awaiting the new DPRD as soon as they wanted to move in the office and residencies in Tuapeijat. Residencies were ruined by neglect and the DPRD office was left in a pitiful state. The office was completely drained from furniture and other inventory such as cars, motorcycles, computers and printers. Even the fans, lamps and the printing paper were taken by the previous users. So again the DPRD had to reside in Padang until the residencies and the office were rehabilitated.

¹⁷³ This probably had to do with the fact that by the end of March 2004 some regions in mainly west Siberut were still not covered by the P4B.

This chapter ends with my final observations in the field in late 2004. Unfortunately the first direct elections for regional administrators (*pemilihan kepala daerah – pilkada*) in Mentawai took place in late August 2006 and is therefore not part of the descriptive elements of this thesis. In the epilogue at the end of this book I will say something about the *pilkada* of 2006, 2011 and 2017.

Conclusion

In retrospect one could say that the transition to bureaucratic and political independency of the Mentawai Archipelago was poorly prepared. All of a sudden in 1999, way before proper decentralisation laws were in place, Mentawai became an independent *kabupaten*. There never was a gradual transition under responsible authority, enabling the new leaders to learn and to grow into their new positions. Apart from a handful progressive individuals who had been active in bureaucratic and political positions outside Mentawai, Mentawaians in general had no administrative, bureaucratic and political experience whatsoever. Despite this gap in experience, they were blinded by the wish to govern themselves. Regardless of whether or not these individuals were adequately skilled and sufficiently trained, *putra asli daerah* preferably Christians, were chosen or elected over others (non-Mentawaian outsiders) who might have been more eligible for the positions at hand. Motivated by the trauma of failing development under the repressive government of these outsiders, self-government and development while maintaining Mentawaian identity became the starting point of the political vision of the new leaders.

This vision, however, met with difficulties in its practical implementation. The new leaders found it difficult to think beyond the *Orde Baru* approach that had focussed mainly on the exploitation of Mentawai's natural resources and project driven development. In the *Orde Baru* approach cultural, religious and social particularities were seen as obstructions to development rather than a basis from which progression could develop from inside the community itself. Being without experience and the *Orde Baru* approach as their only frame of reference, the new leaders had no idea how to combine identity and development in order to spark some form of intrinsic development. While organising some rather weird cultural contests and competitions, which in theory should have led to a revival of Mentawaian identity, the government solely focussed on the physical and economic development of the archipelago. Exactly like the *Orde Baru* regime, the Mentawaian government understood this physical and economic development as a series of projects and outsider investments. With the means, and the distribution thereof, involved in these projects and investments being the most important aspect of development, the actual results of these projects and investments become of minor importance. Projects and investments were seen as a way to make money. Not the predetermined project goal, but the number of people sharing in the means of the project determined whether or not the project was satisfactory. This project thinking was an important factor in the way the political agenda was drawn up and can also be seen as one of the major factors in the stagnant development of the archipelago.

The fact that there was so much money available for the development of the archipelago in combination with inexperienced leaders and little to no control and monitoring was another combination of factors that allowed the stagnation of the development of the archipelago. The lack of proper monitoring and evaluation ensured the unpunished mismanagement of human, natural and monetary resources available. While local NGOs with influence like Yayasan Citra Mandiri (YCM) and Badan Musyawarah Masyarakat Mentawai (BM3) were committed to hold their leaders accountable for their actions, these organisations met with little to no support from the legal institutions (e.g. the provincial government, BAWASDA and the court of justice) responsible for the monitoring and evaluation of the new *kabupaten* and its leaders.

In an overall sense the general public was fairly dissatisfied with the progress made by their new leaders. In contrast with the era in which the Mentawai Archipelago was governed by outsiders, the new leaders were simultaneously fellow Mentawaians, relatives even. This made it difficult to criticise the government. The government apologised beforehand with the argument that they lacked sufficiently educated people, that they had to deal with multi interpretable legislation and that they met with opposition from both Jakarta and Padang. When society did criticise the government they almost immediately got the ball thrown back at them. The local government was quick in outdoing the public by stating that they themselves had to *mandiri sendiri* (selfdevelop) instead of passively waiting for the government to bring them development. This stance created a deadlock in which the local government kept the local communities in an unproductive grip.

