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Of the importance of democratic partnership governance

Dear friends and colleagues, thanks for inviting me to this important conference...

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I think you are quite right in focusing on state-civil society relations in this conference. The main reason for why I think so, is that one of the conclusions in my recent 'summary-book' *In Search of New Social Democracy: Insights from the South - Implications for the North*, is that a major stumbling block is the disregard among progressives for genuinely democratic and transformative linkages between state and society.

This is not just about equal citizenship and direct relations between citizens and state, mediated by citizens' own organisations, rather than by indirect colonial-like relations via local strongmen and ethnic and religious groups. Similarly, it is not only about free and fair elections. Equally important, it is also about democratic participation in policymaking and governance by citizens' interest- and issue-based organisations. In the international discussion, this is often referred to as democratic partnership governance.

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Let us begin with a review of the Indonesian history in this regard.

In the late 1950s' – in spite of successful struggle for equal citizenship and democracy and striking electoral advances – most progressives gave up on democratisation. Instead, they either supported the authoritarian 'Guided Democracy' of left-populist President Sukarno and his army leaders; or they supported military officers in favour of the US-driven idea of prof Samuel Huntington that there must be strong army backed state-institutions ahead of democracy, so-called politics of order, to prevent radical leftists from winning elections.

The result was, firstly, emergency rule and state-corporatist leadership with top-down selected representatives of sectors and groups. Secondly, this also meant that there was no

chance for progressives to resume united struggle for civil rights and democracy against those who used 'Guided Democracy' to capture the state and public resources, nor against Suharto's crack down on the largest popular movement in the world at the time, which was carried out with the colonial method of central despotism and indirect rule through local strongmen and religious and other militias. Thirdly, Suharto's 'New Order' made of course the existing state-corporatism even much more exclusionary and suppressive.

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Consequently, and quite understandably, the dissidents that survived this turned against all kinds of corporatism or partnership governance – fighting instead for liberal democracy through elections and parliament only, plus civil society pressure- and lobby groups. This gained further strength during the global third wave of democracy by also being favoured by international donors.

After *reformasi*, – when the civil society groups had lost out in the transition to elitist democracy – the activists certainly also tried to 'go politics'. But this was mainly by intensive lobbying and to plant their organisations' own people within the state, get access to resources, and engage in horse-trading and contracts with leading politicians.

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There were two major positive exceptions. One was the broad alliances among popular and civic groups – far beyond the *musrembang* and World Bank civil society programme – for deals on liveable cities, such as with populist-reformists like Jokowi. The other and more advanced exception was the similarly broad alliance between unions, CSOs, including among urban poor, and progressive politicians, for the public health reform.

However, the promising openings could not be sustained. Of course, this was partly because there were no follow-up reforms to continue to agree on and fight for. So, the activists returned to their fragmented priorities. It was equally devastating, however, that there was also a lack of a democratic format for inclusive negotiations between the activists and the politicians. For example, trade unions leader Said Iqbal preferred to strike deals with ret. General Prabowo Subianto in face of the 2014 presidential elections, while others turned to other politicians.

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To make things worse, this also meant that the progressives were short of a broad alliance and movement to sustain the anti-corruption work and claim representation in Jokowi's cabinet and staff. For the same reasons they could also not convince Jokowi to launch social democratic policies to contain the right-wing populist and religious identity movement that gained momentum in 2016-17 during the struggle against acting governor Ahok in the Jakarta gubernatorial elections. In face of the presidential elections 2019, Jokowi opted instead for Tony Blair's and Bill Clinton's kind of triangulation of policies and transactional politics, plus to build a coalition with the political elite, including compromise-oriented Muslim leaders, and supportive generals.

After elections, moreover, the president and his new coalition even enforced an Omnibus legislation to foster economic growth based on deregulation and benefits for business. This was at the expense of labour and the environment. And most importantly, it was without any meaningful negotiations with others than business. Labour and others affected were left outside. This practice continues, most recently in the case of the pension funds. To make things worse, it also comes with the reduction of civil rights and liberties.

Remarkably, in spite of this, the progressives remain unable to unite on a common platform that combines the concerns for the deterioration of human rights and democracy, **and** social rights – along with a reform agenda **and** partnership governance.

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These obstacles and setbacks are not unique for Indonesia. As I show in my book, they are instead part of a broader set of problems after the second World War and colonialism. At the time, the efforts in western Europe at development based on social justice by democratic means was not expanded to the Global South.

Instead, democratisation in the South was given up in the late 1950s, followed by so-called middle-class coups sponsored by the West – and Moscow's support for statist 'non-capitalist' regimes. Moreover, even the third wave of democracy against this

authoritarianism, from the late 1970s until recently, was not backed up by similar social democratic oriented policies as in post-war Western Europe.

By implication there was no inclusive economic development generating a broad labour movement in the Global South. Hence there were also continuous problems of uniting people with precarious work conditions. Trade union struggle among the few employees with permanent positions is important but remains insufficient. Professionals and workers with precarious employment conditions or self-employment remain an absolute majority and must be given much more support. Broader unity is needed. Similarly, the new democracy that popular and civic movements fought so hard for was swiftly dominated by elites and oligarchs and turned shallow.

Perhaps worst, as we have seen in the case of Indonesia, even the popular movements and civil society groups adjusted to donors' priorities by confining themselves to civil society work without mass membership. And even those who tried to supplement the trade unions by fighting for social rights and more genuine democracy 'from below' did not make much difference in politics and governance. 'Bottom-up' was fine but insufficient.

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Indonesia is not unique. For example, the extensive protests during the 'Arab Spring' were short of organisation and international protection. The civil society organisations in the Philippines ahead of Duterte were not strong enough at the local level to even make use of the opportunities provided by the progressives in government who tried to initiate participatory budgeting. The civil society activists in India during the left of centre government 2004-2014 initiated impressive social rights reforms such as a rural employment guarantee, but were short of a popular base to contain the rise of religious right wing populist Narendra Modi. The vibrant local civic groups in South Africa were soon dominated by the political bosses in the ANC. The strong civil society movement in Nicaragua failed to organise politically and resist Daniel Ortega's authoritarianism. And even though citizens in Lula's Brazil could participate in local budgeting, this did not help them to press for better policies in the capital and to stop the abuse of powers there, so Bolsonaro gained power.

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However, with access to stronger links between protests and civic actions on the one hand, and state and politics, on the other, there have been openings. Such as to some extent in Tunisia and recently in Sudan. In both cases activists benefitted from the links with the state through trade unions and professional organisations. Or in Kerala where People's Science Movement with good local presence as well as state level connections – plus progressives in parties, government, and the State Planning Board – have provided some coordination and links. Or in Chile where the student groups against the neo-liberal regime built broader alliances and political movements – whose candidate recently even won the presidential election and have appointed a remarkably progressive cabinet.

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In other words, the comparative historical analyses of efforts at Social Democracy in the South in my summary-book suggest clearly that much more priority should be given to democratic links between state and society. Links that supplement human- and equal citizen rights plus free and fair election by participatory partnership governance.

A first step in this direction would be to study previous experiences. We can draw on existing research and activists' insights, locally and internationally.

Let me indicate what may be interesting to review by making a few points about the case of Scandinavia.

Most fundamentally, the Scandinavian experience shows that corporatist partnership governance need not be, or inevitably develop into an Italian kind of statist-fascism, or be related to (i) religious pillars as in the Netherlands, or (ii) top-down statist pillarisation as during 'Guided Democracy' in terms of 'NASAKOM' and 'functional representation', or, (iii) of more authoritarian state-corporatism as under Suharto's New Order.

On the contrary, as for the historical origins, corporatism in Sweden dates to the very early 20th century. This was when the central (and local) public administration wanted to gain inputs and support from major actors in society, especially those that were not well represented through the non-democratic parliament. Moreover, the elite and the administrators wanted to contain conflicts. Hence, this happened before unions gained

strength and before the democratic break-through in Sweden (1909-21). Moreover, the consultations did neither hinder democratisation nor interest- and issue-based organisation.

One precondition was certainly that the Swedish state had become reasonably efficient (after a long period of deterioration and corruption) and largely obeyed the rule of law. Yet, with some elements of this in other contexts, nothing should prevent progressives from suggesting partnership governance ahead of well-functioning democracy.

Secondly, thereafter, the fledgling partnership governance was democratised, along with the full liberal democratisation and the rise of unions and numerous other popular interest and issue organisations that claimed their rights to be consulted. When many of these organisations realised that self-help in civil society was insufficient, and had to be supplemented by welfare programmes plus, investment- and employment policies – then partnership governance was a way of democratising the state and public administration, in addition to the general elections and parliamentary system. Actually, big employers were also happy, as they had a say through partnership governance in spite of losing elections.

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Tripartite forms of negotiations involving state-employers and unions were certainly important to negotiate broader issues of economic and social policies. But the employers and unions were eager to handle as much as possible of the negotiations on wages and workplace matters on their own – to strengthen their own organisations and remain independent of the state. Moreover, even in Sweden where the rate of unionisation is very high, many informal workers and other actors and organisations must also be consulted – from farmers to professional associations, as well as experts. This is of course even more important in the South where the number of informal labourers, free-lance professionals and self-employed is huge. In Sweden, extensive separate partnership governance applied particularly to the farmers. But numerous other partners were also consulted in oral and written hearings on various government proposals. And relevant actors were represented in government agencies, boards, and commissions to prepare legislations, often along with the political parties. Much of this applied on the local level too. Most importantly, while the selection of partners was a matter of discussion, the democratic partner organisations themselves appointed their representatives – not the state from top-down. In fact,

independent interest- and issue-organisations gained strength and turned better nationally organised to make a difference.

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There were certainly problems involved, including the rise of so-called iron triangles between the state and the leaders in the most crucial organisations. But this would have been possible to reform, including by revitalising the public discourse in media and democracy in the organisations, and by expanding the already existing local direct citizen participation in municipal and city planning. In any case, the bossism-tendency was not the main reason for why the system was undermined in the 1980s and early 1990s, especially in Sweden, less so in Norway. On the contrary, the main reason was the rise of neo-liberal ideology, economic policies, and new public management.

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Needless to say, the Scandinavian experiences can't be copied. But some of them may be sources of inspiration and considered in other contexts too. Most importantly, there is a need for wider comparative studies of insights from efforts at partnership governance in various contexts. Concerned scholars and experienced activists need to pool their knowledge. In Indonesia the book and priorities that came out of the survey and case studies by scholars and activists in the early 2000s of the post-Soeharto democracy movement indicate what can be done.¹

In the present case of partnership governance, however, a broader comparative perspective is needed that requires international initiatives. Fingers crossed!

Thanks for your attention!

¹ Prasetyo, A. Stanley, Priyono, A.E., Törnquist, O., et al. *Indonesia's Post- Soeharto Democracy Movement*, Jakarta and Copenhagen: Demos and NIAS Press, 2003, 2004.

