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## The Paradox of Plenty Challenges in Regional Development in Aceh After Two Decades of Special Autonomy

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**Abstract:** Aceh as a region rich in natural resources is still trapped in the paradox of plenty phenomenon. This is ironic if you look at Aceh, which is the poorest region on the island of Sumatra and the welfare of its people is low. This is of course a stark contrast that natural resource wealth should be able to make Aceh more prosperous from various sides. Law No. 18 of 2001 concerning special autonomy for Aceh was basically born as an attempt by the government to bring Aceh out of Aceh from the paradox of plenty. This means that none other than the goal of these efforts is welfare for Aceh. This type of research uses a qualitative approach with library research methods. Meanwhile, the stages of this research consist of problem identification, literature search, research aims and objectives, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, and research reporting. The results showed that special autonomy was not able to bring Aceh out of the paradox of plenty phenomenon. This means that the goals of welfare by creating low poverty, high HDI, high IDI, and low unemployment still seem to have not been completed. In addition, the presence of special autonomy arrangements for Aceh turned out to give birth to new challenges in the field of governance. So far, the disbursement of special autonomy funds has not been able to be managed evenly so economic and social inequalities still occur in Aceh. There is a tendency that the implementation of Aceh's special autonomy for the past two decades has been exploited by certain politically related groups. The DOKA disbursement, which began in 2008 from the central government, has not been felt by the people of Aceh to this day. This finding is certainly a critical reflection for the government to evaluate this asymmetric arrangement in a comprehensive and sustainable manner for the welfare of Aceh.

**Keywords:** natural resources; special autonomy; paradox of plenty; welfare development

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## I. Introduction

The phenomenon of the paradox of plenty or resource curse is still a challenge, especially for areas with abundant natural resources. Regions that have abundant natural resource wealth which should have ideals for fast economic growth, have low poverty rates, and high welfare levels. However, this ideal contrasts with slower economic growth, higher poverty rates, and lower welfare (Sholikin, 2020). The term has become popular in the study of political ecology to look more deeply into areas that have abundant natural resources (Benjaminsen, 1997, p. 122). However, in reality, the wealth of natural resources it has does not necessarily contribute to the development of the region in a better direction. These regions include Angola, Nigeria, Sudan, Venezuela, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Congo (Mehlum et al., 2006). Although there are also regions that have abundant natural resources and can contribute to strong economic growth, high, low poverty, and high welfare. However, various studies show that there is a tendency generated by the wealth of natural resources to hinder the development of a region. The debate is condensed into three terms regarding governance techniques, namely: Natural Resource Curse (Auty, 2004; M. Ross, 2001), the Paradox of Plenty (Gelb, 1988), and Dutch Disease (Corden & Neary, 1982), all of which talk about the law of natural wealth and its impact on a region.

In areas that are abundant in natural resources such as oil and gas, the performance of economic development and good governance tends to be much worse than in areas with smaller natural resources (Sholikin, 2020). In the context of Angola as a country with oil wealth, it makes Angola a country with high poverty vulnerability (Mehlum et al., 2006). This is certainly an interesting study in the study of government politics on the paradox of plenty phenomenon that still occurs in areas rich in natural resources. The interesting point here is that the regions receiving special autonomy regulations are not seen as a catalyst for re-functioning how natural resource wealth can improve the welfare of a region. As a result, the political ecology approach to understanding special autonomy in various literature is still very minimal. In the Indonesian context, it seems that what has been revealed by political-ecological scientists is still happening today. This is of course very relevant to how Indonesia's wealth of natural resources does not seem to contribute to the welfare of the region concerned, especially in natural resource-rich

regions that receive special autonomy arrangements (asymmetric decentralization). Indonesia as a developing country with its inherent wealth of natural resources is still considered by various parties as a country that tends to be trapped by the abundance of its own resources. The Table 1 shows the mapping of natural resource wealth in Indonesia and the intensity of conflict carried out by Tadjoeidin (2007).

**Table 1.** Region Rich in Natural Resources and Conflict Intensity in Indonesia

Province	Main Resources	Conflict Level	Manifested Conflict
Aceh	Natural gas, timber	High	Well-articulated secessionist political movement  A significant violent insurgency by an organized rebel group (GAM)
Papua	Oil, copper, gold, natural gas, timber	Medium	Fragmented and poorly articulated secessionist political movement A minor violent insurgency by a less organized rebel group (OPM)
Riau	Oil, natural gas, minerals, timber	Low	Minor political secessionist sentiment
East Kalimantan	Oil, natural gas, minerals, timber	Low	Low Minor political secessionist sentiment

Source: Tadjoeidin (2007)

The mapping conducted by Tadjoeidin illustrates that the natural resource wealth in an area tends to be followed by conflict. This means that indirectly natural resources have played a role in constructing conflicts so that areas rich in natural resources tend to be left behind in various aspects compared to other regions that are not rich. Natural resource-rich areas present a struggle for resources over who and how much they have access to these resources. On the other hand, failure to manage resources that have an impact on welfare also increases the likelihood that conflicts will arise. This data confirms how Aceh, which is one of the provinces in Indonesia, with its natural resource wealth is directly proportional to the intensity of the conflict. This tends to bring Aceh into an area that has conflict intensity with "high" achievements compared to natural resource-producing areas in Indonesia. Interestingly, the intensity of the conflict that occurred in Aceh was one level higher than that of Papua which had a "medium" level. This condition is the dominant foothold for ecological political experts who always argue that natural resource wealth in an area tends to produce conflict without strong political institutions (de Jouvenel, 2017). In the end, the conflict hampered the region

concerned in its economic growth, prosperity, and injustice.

Many studies have been conducted to prove that natural resource wealth in an area is negatively correlated with economic growth, welfare development, and high poverty rates. As explained in the opening above, these figures are the Natural Resource Curse (Auty, 2004; M. Ross, 2001), Paradox of Plenty (Gelb, 1988) and Dutch Disease (Corden & Neary, 1982), and Mehlum et al. (2006). Research conducted by Le Billon (2001) emphasizes that there is a correlation between armed conflict and natural resources. Le Billon (2001) mentions that the two have a direct relationship in two main ways, the namely armed conflict which is motivated by the control of resources and resources that are integrated into the financing of armed conflict. Although some wars were initially motivated by conflicts over resource tenure, many integrated resources into their political economy. While it would be a mistake to reduce armed conflict to a greed-driven resource war, politics and identity factors remain key (Amundsen, 2014, p. 173). In addition, control of local resources also affects the agenda and strategy of the belligerent parties. This influence is exerted through local resource exploitation schemes, which involve regional production based on resource location, control and access to labor and capital, institutional structures and resource management practices, and incorporation into global trade networks (Le Billon, 2001).

While research conducted by M. Ross (2001) states that every region that is rich in natural resources and has a dependence on the condition of its natural resource wealth without seeking and finding new economic sources outside of natural resources, will have four main effects. These effects include firstly it can damage a country's economic performance, secondly, it can make its government weaker, more corrupt, and less accountable, and thirdly it can provide incentives for people living in resource-rich areas to form an independent state (rebel group to secessionist) and lastly. can help to finance insurgent movements (M. Ross, 2003). M. Ross' study shows that the four domino effects are dominant in countries rich in natural resources. In the context of a unitary state, for example, it can be observed in each provincial region, and for a federal state, it can also be seen from the constituent states.

As happened in Aceh wherein the perspective of political ecology, the reality of natural resources

in Aceh has contributed to the conflict between the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) and the Central Government. The issuance of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the Central Government and GAM through the Helsinki Agreement in 2005 marked the beginning of the easing of conflict turmoil in Aceh. Especially after the enactment of Law Number 11 of 2006 concerning the Government of Aceh, which mandates the status of Aceh as a recipient of special autonomy. These two important moments started a new chapter of peaceful, complete, and sustainable conflict resolution which essentially wanted to rebuild the Aceh region and its people after the earthquake and tsunami disaster in Aceh (Ikhsan et al., 2020). Law No. 18 of 2001 has regulated the status of special autonomy for the Province of the Special Region of Aceh and followed by changes in the nomenclature of Aceh from Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam, DI Aceh, and now to Aceh is part of the dynamics of how the Central Government provides space for Aceh to develop its economy and welfare in a sustainable manner. independently through special attention.

The spirit of special autonomy given by the Central Government to Aceh, apart from political motives, also includes welfare issues. In this context, the effort of the presence of special autonomy for Aceh is to change the stigma that the labeling of Aceh as a "paradox of plenty" region needs to be removed. Therefore, removing the label basically also demands that this special autonomy policy be able to bring prosperity to Aceh. There is a guarantee and certainty from the Central Government that this special autonomy policy gives Aceh more authority, especially in managing the wealth of natural resources it has for the welfare and justice of the people in Aceh as stated in Table 2 of this paper. This is the essence of eliminating the paradox of plenty labeling. In this context, the presence of special autonomy in Aceh can be interpreted as an effort for more accelerated development of Aceh. Departing from the non-functioning of natural resource wealth in Aceh tends to produce negative effects. As stated by Aspinall (2007), where the negative effect of the abundance of natural resources is the contribution of the state which failed to manage the blessings of natural resources, this rebel group emerged. Therefore, this special autonomy in the context of Aceh tries to exist to take over the function that should be played and played by the abundance of natural resources in Aceh, namely, to bring prosperity as it should.

**Table 2.** Realization of Original Local Government Revenues in Aceh Regencies or Cities 2016–2020 (Billion Rupiahs)

Regencies/Cities	2016	2017	2018	2019*	2020*
Banda Aceh	258,591,409,660.00	270,170,805,360.00	246,272,150,480.00	235,11	309,70
South Aceh	125,989,165,878.83	140,751,362,340.70	151,961,434,830.97	139,98	126,94
Lhokseumawe	56,348,631,400.00	62,979,495,103.85	65,610,426,908.60	61,44	67,22
Northern Aceh	388,850,936,086.81	202,092,003,328.00	299,541,200,896.00	280,14	288,59
Langsa	121,369,467,375.72	120,138,956,032.87	121,358,576,034.93	115,24	159,53
East Aceh	94,337,443,632.42	158,492,371,449.82	169,455,864,158.29	185,15	210,85
Aceh Tamiang	114,051,092,363.75	116,246,212,753.70	128,914,585,324.92	128,91	139,73
West Aceh	140,614,480,000.00	161,743,458,000.00	150,499,050,000.00	153,80	144,77
Aceh Besar	135,284,494,840.00	145,464,468,480.00	159,480,168,137.63	170,50	170,99
Aceh Jaya	45,774,374,000.00	52,599,501,000.00	58,624,901,000.00	72,78	83,12
Pidie	249,489,453,840.00	267,608,101,030.00	237,201,958,010.00	243,22	229,00
Pidie Jaya	45,986,244,000.00	47,409,466,000.00	57,324,815,000.00	68,83	79,68
Bireuen	186,162,575,752.23	192.939.858.236.27	179,476,248,778.22	156,53	173,00
Bener Meuriah	66,454,059,144.63	82,038,407,023.70	67,961,546,855	76,66	92,96
Simeulue	48,614,164,736.00	61,095,183,850.00	63,146,021,910.00	79,47	64,80
Central Aceh	156,797,291,510.00	162,880,726,000.00	150,818,710,380.00	190,32	179,68
Sabang	49,602,492,605.34	47,776,631,104.80	31,676,892,439.54	59,78	61,74
Southwest Aceh	77,618,650,000.00	91,571,490,000.00	83,468,000,000.00	90,35	94,70
Subussalam	42,314,514,320.00	56,519,514,120.00	38,955,598,640.00	51,81	66,94
Aceh Singkil	43,305,198,369.90	2,851,805,739.00	75,238,699,146.57	45,26	61,14
Gayo Lues	46,277,349,070.00	60,312,455,600.00	48,758,464,130.00	51,42	54,10
Nagan Raya	104,200,297,000.00	74,051,054,000.00	97,118,516,000.00	87,63	89,41
Southeast Aceh	61,457,042,356.11	60.053.234.222.18	14,955,587,988.42	117,63	95,03

Source: Aceh Province Budget Realization Report

Based on data released by the Aceh Provincial Government through the acehprov.go.id page, it is stated that natural resource wealth in Aceh contributes 50% of Aceh's Original Regional Income (PAD). As shown in [Table 2](#), Aceh's PAD from 2016 to 2020.

Based on Aceh's PAD data above, the increasing trend experienced by both regencies/cities is supported by 50% of income from natural resources. This means that regions with abundant natural resource wealth will increase the PAD of the region concerned, and regions with minimal natural resources will tend to produce lower PAD.

In addition to this asymmetric decentralization policy, Aceh has benefited from the disbursement of special autonomy funds which has been increasing from year to year and started in 2008. As stated in [Table 3](#), where Aceh receives DOKA disbursement which has increased significantly every year.

**Table 3.** Papua Special Autonomy Fund for 2008–2021

No	Year	Special Autonomy Fund (Trillion)
1	2008	3.590
2	2009	3.728
3	2010	3.849
4	2011	4.510
5	2012	5.479
6	2013	6.222
7	2014	6.824
8	2015	7.054
9	2016	7.707
10	2017	7.970
11	2018	8.030
12	2019	8.360
13	2020	8.300
14	2021	7.700

Source: processed from various sources

Based on [Table 3](#), since Aceh received DOKA disbursement starting in 2008, the movement has increased every year. Only in 2021, DOKA received by Aceh has decreased because of the spread of the Coronavirus. This means that the dominance of the increase in funds will be a blessing for regional financial pockets in Aceh as a source of finance in building a welfare-based society.

Not to mention the natural resource revenue-sharing funds from the Central Government. Data from the Association of Oil and Gas and Renewable Energy Producing Regions (ADPMET) 2001 shows that the total realization of the oil and gas DBH channel in 2016–2020 is Rp1,160,052,659,822,- and the average DBH for the total oil and gas for the last 5 years is Rp232,010,531,964,-. The question then is with such large financial resources, not to mention there are infrastructure funds that after two decades of special autonomy, for example, are contained in the 2020 State Budget for additional infrastructure funds of Rp4.7 trillion and DOKA of Rp16.7 trillion. Then how to focus the use of these funds. Therefore, this potential should be able to lead Aceh out of the paradox of plenty. To what extent has this special autonomy performance brought Aceh still lame from this phenomenon, and what has its achievements been like over the past two decades? These two questions become important to discuss about how the performance of special autonomy in the past two decades has tried to get Aceh out of the trap of the paradox of plenty. This means that there is a welfare goal that is hope for all parties with serious challenges, where the wealth of natural resources owned can really build high welfare. Therefore, the challenge that emerged later in the context of Aceh was how the wealth of natural resources it possessed was able to provide prosperity in various lines for Aceh, not contrasting with the welfare goals.

In accordance with the previous two problem formulations, this paper will try to answer the two problem formulations. This is important because so far, studies on special autonomy are still minimally studied in an ecological political approach. Whereas the issue of special autonomy is basically to provide space for Aceh so that they can independently manage their resources for the welfare of their people. Indeed, from the perspective of governance, public policy, welfare, or conflict resolution still dominates. Therefore, the political ecology approach is here to offer a new perspective in looking at the two decades of implementation of this special autonomy. Natural resources such as Aceh and Papua have a very

strong correlation between natural resources and regional development. Meanwhile, at the same time, special autonomy exists to unravel the paradox of plenty that is produced between the combination of natural resources and the conflict.

The novelty of this research lies in the theoretical approach used in viewing special autonomy. In examining the extent of special autonomy that has been running for the past two decades in Aceh, the researcher uses the resource dependency theory approach presented by Auty and Ross. However, with the consideration of Auty and Ross' theory that has been widely studied, the research tries to change the tools, namely that it is no longer the wealth of resources that is used as a reference as welfare output, but how special autonomy in Aceh takes over the role of Aceh's resource wealth which should be based on development in Aceh. This means that this special autonomy tries to re-function the role of natural resource wealth in Aceh to be able to escape from the paradox of the abundance paradox. This is done by researchers because there is no literature that positions this special autonomy as an instrument to take on the role of resource wealth, especially in areas with an abundance of natural resources. In each region that is abundant with natural resources such as oil and gas, the performance of economic development and good governance is often worse than in a region with smaller natural resources ([Auty, 2004](#)), as well as a region that has abundant oil and mineral wealth does not have any impact on the lives of the poor, especially in terms of poverty and levels of human development ([M. Ross, 2001](#)). Although the course has certainly undergone considerable changes, Ross's approach is still relevant because it is almost certain that natural resource wealth is not a guarantee to create a better quality of human development.

## II. Methods

This type of research uses a qualitative approach with library research methods. This approach allows researchers to track various relevant literature sources in answering the problem formulation that has been determined. The focus of the research in this paper is the two decades of implementing special autonomy for Aceh. The theoretical approach used in this research is to use Auty and Ross' theory about the paradox of natural resource abundance by combining special autonomy as a way out of the abundance paradox. Meanwhile, to search for data, researchers used a

method by collecting all secondary data such as journals, relevant agency documents, mass media, and various other literature that supports answering the problem formulation that has been determined. In collecting data, the researcher prioritizes the precautionary principle in tracing relevant secondary data, considering that there are quite a lot of data so more stringent data selection is needed. This research was conducted from September 10, 2021, to March 29, 2022, by observing all developments in welfare in Aceh.

This research is urgent to do because the researcher tries to place this special autonomy as an accelerator instrument to get Aceh out of the paradox of plenty. The focus of this research is Aceh's special autonomy for several reasons. First, geographically, Aceh is one of the provinces in Indonesia that has abundant natural resources, be it natural gas, oil, and others. Aceh received a stimulus from the Aceh Special Autonomy (Otsus) fund for a period of 20 years, the first to the fifteenth year of Special Autonomy (Otsus) funds amounting to 2% of the national General Allocation Fund (DAU) ceiling, then in the fifteenth to twentieth year amounting to 1% of the national General Allocation Fund (DAU) ceiling (Mediyanti, 2019, p. 56). The use of special autonomy funds used for development and people's welfare is expected to boost regional economic sectors. Second, Aceh in various studies is mapped in areas that have the highest level of conflict compared to natural resource-rich areas in Indonesia. To a study conducted by Bertrand (2019, p. 30) that the conflict in Aceh was triggered by the control of oil and gas, giving birth to the rebel group. Third, the granting of special autonomy status to Aceh does not seem to contribute to welfare development. And finally, the author put forward the initial assumption that there is a strong relationship between how the wealth of natural resources in Aceh has an impact on various welfare problems in Aceh, with special autonomy being used as a tool to stimulate these problems. Meanwhile, in conducting the research stages, the researcher uses Creswell's concept. The stages of qualitative research according to Creswell consist of problem identification, literature search, research purposes and objectives, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, and research reporting (Creswell, 2014).

### III. Results and Discussion

Bringing a high level of welfare to a region blessed with natural resources is a challenge. What often happens is that poor state institutions in controlling natural resources actually prevent a region from developing (Brunnschweiler & Bulte, 2008) as stated by Auty that regions that are abundant with natural resources such as oil and gas, the performance of economic development and good governance is often worse than the region with smaller natural resources (Auty, 2004) and the region which has abundant oil and mineral wealth does not have any impact on the lives of the poor, especially in terms of poverty and the level of human development (M. Ross, 2001). Auty's study underscores that the abundance of certain natural resources can have implications for the economic development and governance of a region. Meanwhile, Ross said it would have an impact on the poverty level of each region and the level of human development. It is a paradox that some countries that are endowed with rich natural resources, especially petroleum resources, alluvial diamonds, and other minerals, such as timber and fish, experience a decline in economic expansion and diversification, and tend to have a very low Human Development Index, deteriorating in terms of redistribution and democratization (Amundsen, 2014).

Although not all regions rich in natural resources experience these problems, the key to their failure or success lies in the capacity of the state through its institutional institutions to control the blessings of natural resources on a regular basis and ensure that these blessings are evenly distributed (Besley & Persson, 2010, p. 30). Therefore, the blessing of natural resources cannot be generalized in all regions, but as long as institutional control is weak, a paradox of plenty will emerge.

Aceh as part of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia has a large wealth of natural resources (natural gas and oil). This region has always been known as a region rich in natural resources. Each region in Aceh has abundant natural resource potential and this contributes to the state's financial income. Table 4 shows the potential wealth of natural resources mapped by the Department of Energy, Natural Resources and Minerals (ESDM) of Aceh Province.

This potential shows the wealth of natural resources in Aceh. The data also shows that there are still many unexplored natural resources in

**Table 4.** Potential Natural Resources in Each Region in Aceh Province

Regencies/Cities	Commodity	Natural Resources Potential	Information
Aceh Besar	Phosphate	140.000 tons	Partially mined
	Tras	99.304.000 tons	Mined already
	Diatome	700.000.000 tons	Not yet mined
	Magnesite/Supertinite	210.000.000 tons	Not yet mined
	Iron ore/Magnesite	4.200.000 tons	Mined already
	Iron sand	720.000 tons	Mined already
Aceh Jaya	Gold	0.2-4 ppm	Placer (unmined)
	Dolomite limestone	5.350.000.000 tons	Not yet mined
	Marble	900.000.000 tons	Not yet mined
	Phosphate	77.000 tons	Not yet mined
	Coal	2.400 tons	Not yet mined
	Quartz sand	255.000.000.000 tons	SiO <sub>2</sub> content 86 – 94%
	Andesite	670.000.000 tons	Not yet mined
Sabang	Puzolan/tras	9.000.000 tons	Not yet mined
	Diatome	120.000 tons	Not yet mined
	Kaolin	32.800.000 tons	Not yet mined
	Sulfur	6.400 tons	Not yet mined
	Andesite	930.000.000 tons	Not yet mined
	Geothermal	74.144 Mwe	(Type C)
Pidie	Gold, Silver, Copper	4 – 12 ppm (gr/ton)	Primary Sediment
	Gold	0.4 – 2.4 gr/ton	Secondary Sediment
	Copper	8 – 40 gr/ton	Primary Unmined
	Iron ore	10.000 tons	River Deposit
	Pozzolan/tras	65.000.000 tons	Not yet mined
	Diatome	1.400.000 tons	Not yet mined
West Aceh	Gold	0.2 – 4 ppm (gr/ton)	Placer (river deposit)
	Coal	350.900.000 tons	Calories 4,200 – 5,600
	Dolomite	800.000.000 tons	MgO levels 4 – 14%
	Marble	200.000.000 tons	Gray
	Phosphate	3.400 tons	3,400
Nagan Raya	Coal	9.000.000 tons	Guano type
	Marble	120.000 tons	Not yet mined
	Dolomite	32.800.000 tons	Not yet mined
	Gold	6.400 tons	Not yet mined
Southwest Aceh	Magnetite iron ore	12.900.000 tons	Not yet mined
	Magnetite/supermitite	3.600.000 tons	Primary
	Marble	3.431.000 tons	Not yet mined
South Aceh	Magnetite iron ore	1.200.000 tons	Not yet mined
	Manganese	4.200.000 tons	Primary Sediment
	Marble	160.750.000 tons	Primary Sediment

Regencies/Cities	Commodity	Natural Resources Potential	Information
Subulussalam	Magnetite Iron Ore	20.000.000 tons	Crystalline gray color
	Galena/Pin	4.000.000 tons	Primary, Unmined
EAST ACEH	Lead	400.000 tons	Primary, Unmined
	Magnetite Iron Ore	22.000.000 tons	Primary, Unmined
	Granite	900.000.000 tons	Primary, Unmined
Gayo Lues	Tin Hit	1.200.000 tons	Primary, Unmined
	Magnetite Iron Ore	22.000.000 tons	Primary, Unmined
	Marble	400.000.000 tons	Primary, Unmined
Aceh Tamiang	Lead	2.400.000 tons	Crystalline gray
	Dolomite	1.190.000.000 tons	Primary, Unmined
Aceh Singkil	Phosphate	400.000 tons	Mgo content 14 – 24%
	Quartz sand	5.250.000 tons	Mined already
	Peat	11.800.000 tons	SiO <sub>2</sub> content 82 – 92%

Source: Department of Energy, Resources and Minerals of Aceh Province, 2019

Aceh and most of them have not been managed. This means that the wealth of natural resources is very prospective for the future of prosperity in Aceh. Like most people, economists love paradoxes. Therefore, it is not surprising that the curse has inspired many economists to consider its origins or test its resistance (Brunnschweiler & Bulte, 2008). As in the case of Aceh, how the abundance of natural resources still makes the region still beset with welfare problems. Therefore, it should be seen that this special autonomy is a stimulus arrangement to build prosperity and economic growth in Aceh, especially in the two decades of implementing special autonomy.

### A. Aceh's Economic Development Within the Framework of Special Autonomy

The strong defense of the paradox of plenty in Aceh has supported the argument of most economists in the 1980s who stated that the existence of abundant natural resources did not make its people enjoy a high standard of living (Rahma et al., 2021). The rate of economic growth, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, or the poverty rate actually weakens and is caused by the abundance effect. In this case, the abundance of natural resources is related to stocks and refers to a proxy for the availability or limited content of underground resources or natural resources deposits (Brunnschweiler & Bulte, 2008).

Aceh is a representative case to prove its economic growth rate, GDP per capita, poverty, and human development which tend to be

correlated with the effects of an abundance of natural resources. Departing from the chaos of economic work, the Central Government provided a stimulus for Aceh to revitalize the chaos of the system with a package of special autonomy arrangements. It is hoped that this arrangement will have a positive reaction from the special autonomy arrangement on economic growth in Aceh. The performance of economic development in Aceh is not going well and it is suspected that there is an effect of an abundance of natural resources. The question that arises then is whether special autonomy through the special autonomy fund (DOKA) is the solution for economic growth in Aceh?

Indeed, economic growth in Aceh is enough to make matters more complicated. On the one hand, economic work is weakened due to the effect of natural resources. As shown in Table 5 regarding the level of dependence of each province in Indonesia which has a high dependence on natural resources, especially oil and natural gas, it will tend to be prone to be trapped in the natural resource curse phenomenon.

Based on the data from the calculation of the analysis of the dependence on natural resources above, it can be seen that the highest NRDI value was achieved by the Province of East Kalimantan at 75.72. This figure is very unequal to other provinces. there are other provinces that also have a high dependence on mining natural resources, namely West Papua at 50.86, Papua 31.88, and Riau 21.50, while West Papua stands out for IDBHT in addition to East Kalimantan,



**Table 5.** Natural Resource Dependence Index (NRDI) 2021

Province	PDRB Mining Sector (Rp thousand/capita *)	IPDRBT	DBH SDA (Rp thousand/capita **)	IDBHSDA	NRDI
East Kalimantan	65.082,44	91,62	3.564,67	59,82	75,72
West Papua	12.714,24	17,75	5.004,28	83,97	50,86
Papua	17.471,99	24,47	2.341,56	39,29	31,88
Riau	17.399,56	24,36	1.110,65	18,64	21,50
Riau islands	12.505,12	17,46	964,37	16,18	16,82
Aceh	2.131,07	2,83	1.599,74	26,84	14,84
South Borneo	7.653,37	10,62	899,82	15,10	12,86
South Sumatra	6.878,45	9,52	566,64	9,51	9,52
Jambi	9.098,35	12,65	325,30	5,46	9,06
Central Kalimantan	5.310,80	7,31	316,68	5,31	6,31
Bangka Belitung Islands	4.687,10	6,43	348,88	5,85	6,14
Southeast Sulawesi	6.166,54	8,52	109,63	1,84	5,18
West Nusa Tenggara	3.700,50	5,04	80,06	1,34	3,19
Central Sulawesi	3.670,04	5,00	72,27	1,21	3,11
North Maluku	1.804,60	2,37	182,68	3,07	2,72
East Java	1.755,80	2,30	54,58	0,92	1,61
South Sulawesi	1.793,85	2,35	21,73	0,36	1,36
Lampung	1.507,15	1,95	36,05	0,60	1,28
Bengkulu	769,66	0,91	96,59	1,62	1,26
North Sulawesi	1.441,99	1,85	37,27	0,63	1,24
West Kalimantan	1.046,83	1,30	29,04	0,49	0,89
North Sumatra	1.169,85	1,47	6,84	0,11	0,79
West Java	579,72	0,64	26,50	0,44	0,54
Maluku	472,93	0,49	3,97	0,07	0,28
Central Java	509,82	0,54	0,78	0,01	0,28
DKI Jakarta	290,31	0,23	17,31	0,29	0,26
West Sulawesi	440,91	0,44	3,41	0,06	0,25
North Sumatra	417,17	0,41	4,61	0,08	0,24
Bali	362,67	0,33	0,00	0,00	0,17
Gorontalo	256,53	0,18	3,68	0,06	0,12
Banten	229,98	0,15	1,42	0,02	0,08
East Nusa Tenggara	161,81	0,05	3,68	0,06	0,06
D. I. Yogyakarta	128,57	0,00	0,05	0,00	0,00

Source: \* Gross Regional Domestic Product of Provinces in Indonesia by BPS Business Field (processed); \*\*LKPP, Ministry of Finance (Rahma et al., 2021, p. 156)

Papua, and Aceh. As is well known, Riau, West Papua, and Aceh are the main producers of oil and gas, while Papua is the largest producer of gold minerals in Indonesia through PT. Freeport Indonesia. Meanwhile, the provinces that have the

lowest dependence on mining natural resources are the D. I. Yogyakarta and East Nusa Tenggara regions. The province of D. I. Yogyakarta even has almost no dependence at all on the mining sector.

This study by Rahma et al. shows four basic findings on how this dependence correlates with regional development performance. Based on the results of calculations and analysis, it is concluded that there are four findings on the relationship between the region's dependence on natural resources (NRDI) and the achievement of sustainable development performance in the region (RSDI). First, the high dependence on mining natural resources, both in terms of GRDP and natural resource DBH, does not guarantee that a region is able to produce high sustainable development performance. Second, the NRC phenomenon is more prone to occur in regions with a greater dependence on mining natural resources. Third, oil and gas producing provinces experience a greater NRC phenomenon than other regions that rely solely on minerals and coal. Fourth, regions that have a higher sustainability score in their regional development show a greater tendency to avoid the NRC phenomenon (Rahma et al., 2021). Therefore, Aceh, which is included in the region with a high dependence on natural resources coupled with its condition as a producer of oil and natural gas makes this paradox of plenty phenomenon unavoidable.

On the other hand, the special autonomy arrangement also did not give a positive reaction to economic development in Aceh. In fact, to achieve a measure of welfare in Aceh, economic work is a prerequisite that must be addressed in building a better standard of living in Aceh. Table 6 shows the economic growth of the entire island of Sumatra in 2020 based on the Central Statistics Agency of Aceh.

**Table 6.** Economic Growth (ADHK-2010) and GRDP Per Capita (ADHB) of All Sumatra Provinces, 2020

Province	Growth Rate (%)	GRDP Per Capita (Rp million)
Aceh	-0.37	31.54
North Sumatra	-1.07	54.82
West Sumatra	-1.60	43.75
Riau	-1.12	114.04
Jambi	-0.46	53.80
South Sumatra	-0.11	54.14
Bengkulu	-0.02	36.48
Lampung	-1.67	39.37
Bangka Belitung Islands	-2.30	51.89
Riau islands	-3.80	124.23

Source: Central Statistics Agency of Aceh, 2021

The data shows the performance of the economy throughout Sumatra Island as a comparative picture where the Riau Islands

Province appears with the lowest economic growth in all of Sumatra Island. While Aceh ranks third on the entire island of Sumatra. Aceh has a decline in economic growth below 1 percent. Meanwhile, when viewed from per capita GRDP indicators, only Riau and Riau Islands were able to penetrate 100 million rupiahs per capita, while Aceh, Lampung, and Bengkulu GRDP achievements were still below 40 million. Although Aceh's GRDP has not been able to penetrate 100 million rupiahs per capita, there is a stretch in Aceh's economic performance that has begun to wake up from its slump. It can be seen that Aceh's economic growth within the scope of Sumatra Island is no longer in the lowest lane, but there is an increase under Bengkulu and South Sumatra in ranking.

Aceh receives Aceh Special Autonomy (Otsus) funds for a period of 20 years, special autonomy funds for the first to fifteenth years are 2% of the national General Allocation Fund (DAU) ceiling, while in the fifteenth to twentieth years it is 1% of the ceiling. National DAU (Isa et al., 2015). The use of special autonomy funds to build development and people's welfare is expected to boost regional economic sectors. However, this reality tends not to work significantly when looking at poverty data from the BPS in 2021 for the entire island of Sumatra. BPS places Aceh as the province with the highest percentage on the island of Sumatra. The use of the Aceh Government's special autonomy funds, either through the provincial special autonomy or the allocation of special autonomy for regencies and cities, has not been able to significantly stimulate economic growth. This is because, although the allocation of special autonomy funds to the Aceh government, both special autonomy for Aceh and special autonomy for regencies and cities, which continues to rise and grow every year, it does not go hand in hand with the economic growth that occurs. In addition, the contribution of Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP) to constant prices in certain regencies/cities in Aceh has decreased. For example, the City of Lhokseumawe experienced a very sharp decline of Rp2,497,756.500.000, - resulting in a very significant decrease in the 2010-2017 period (Meliza & Murtala, 2020, p. 27). The economic growth that occurred in Aceh after the Special Autonomy was not significantly affected by changes in budget allocations from spending made by the government (Mediyanti, 2019). In fact, with high economic growth, the level of welfare will automatically increase.

## B. Weak Special Autonomy Management: Infrastructure Gap to Weak Human Development

Weak governance carried out by the Aceh Government and the Central Government does not seem to have much impact on welfare. Although in reality, this special autonomy has brought about a change for the better than before, in the context of competition with other regions, Aceh is still running slowly. There is a major weakness in that the existence of DOKA (special autonomy fund for Aceh) is to organize and improve the face of welfare which so far has not been felt by the people of Aceh equally. As Table 7 follows, how is economic growth in Aceh in the period 2004–2017 when compared to oil and gas accumulation and non-oil and gas accumulation.

Based on the data above, in the period 2004–2017 economic growth in Aceh experienced a negative trend six times with a record including oil and gas. However, the interesting phenomenon is that if oil and gas are not included, then in the period 2004–2017 there is no negative trend of economic growth in Aceh. This means that the data shows how the effects of oil and gas affect Aceh's economic growth rate and tend to bring a negative trend (minus economic growth). Therefore, the correlation of natural resources with economic growth which tends to be inhibited in some cases still occurs.

At the same time, criticism of special autonomy was born due to the disparity in infrastructure development, poverty, and HDI in every regency/city in Aceh Province. If this DOKA is disbursed starting in 2008 for Aceh, then at least it has been 13 years since this DOKA has been given by the Central Government. The government through the Ministry of Finance clearly mandates that the use of DOKA is intended to finance infrastructure development and maintenance, people's economic empowerment, poverty alleviation, as well as funding for education, social, and health ([Direktorat Jenderal Perimbangan Keuangan Kementerian Keuangan, n.d.](#)). However, in terms of infrastructure development, DOKA has not been able to be managed properly. Infrastructure development has an impact on economic growth in a region. In this case, the infrastructure gap in Aceh between rural versus urban areas is still quite sharp, and this tends to have an impact not only on the instability of economic growth in Aceh, but also on poverty, unemployment, and quality of human development in Aceh. As shown in Table 8, the disparity in infrastructure development occurred in Aceh in the 2015–2019 period.

The data shows the infrastructure development index in Aceh with a sharp gap between regions in Aceh Province. The infrastructure development of each region will have a high score if the IDI (Infrastructure

**Table 7.** Aceh Economic Growth 2004–2017 and GDP per Capita 2007–2017 Either With Oil and Gas Accumulation or Without Oil and Gas

No.	Year	With Oil and Gas	GDP per Capita	Without Oil and Gas	GDP per Capita
1	2004	-9.6	-	1.8	-
2	2005	-10.1	-	1.2	-
3	2006	1.6	-	7.7	-
4	2007	-2.5	1,684.90	7.4	1,178.31
5	2008	-8.3	1,705.60	1.9	1,601.07
6	2009	-3.82	1,633.66	3.78	1,336.84
7	2010	2.79	1,760.97	5.49	1,468.62
8	2011	5.02	1,914.05	5.89	1,599.36
9	2012	5.21	2,034.72	6.09	1,714.83
10	2013	4.82	2,012.00	5.45	1,714.00
11	2014	2.71	2,193.63	4.02	1,971.61
12	2015	-0.72	1,927.16	4.34	1,852.34
13	2016	3.31	2,024.33	4.31	1,961.90
14	2017	4.19	2,112.15	4.14	2,043.57

Source: BPS (Central Bureau of Statistics)

**Table 8.** Aceh Infrastructure Development Index 2015–2019

No.	Regencies/Cities	Infrastructure Development Index				
		2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
1	West Aceh	0.652	0.704	0.687	0.704	0.708
2	Southwest Aceh	0.376	0.354	0.374	0.388	0.375
3	Aceh Besar	0.745	0.746	0.752	0.793	0.757
4	Aceh Jaya	0.656	0.591	0.608	0.664	0.603
5	South Aceh	0.610	0.575	0.594	0.642	0.598
6	Aceh Singkil	0.559	0.612	0.680	0.616	0.601
7	Aceh Tamiang	0.668	0.662	0.672	0.695	0.678
8	Central Aceh	0.478	0.512	0.507	0.540	0.530
9	Southeast Aceh	0.602	0.581	0.588	0.634	0.611
10	East Aceh	0.663	0.655	0.656	0.703	0.674
11	North Aceh	0.700	0.696	0.686	0.746	0.703
12	Really Merry	0.628	0.672	0.676	0.686	0.674
13	Bireuen	0.661	0.623	0.634	0.688	0.644
14	Gayo Lues	0.188	0.267	0.269	0.233	0.274
15	City of Banda Aceh	0.797	0.714	0.719	0.762	0.732
16	City of Langsa	0.108	0.126	0.148	0.141	0.152
17	City of Lhokseumawe	0.646	0.598	0.619	0.679	0.621
18	City of Sabang	0.800	0.638	0.653	0.651	0.807
19	City of Subulussalam	0.385	0.471	0.474	0.474	0.495
20	Nagan Raya	0.698	0.640	0.650	0.715	0.664
21	Pidie	0.711	0.701	0.694	0.747	0.721
22	Pidie Jaya	0.652	0.612	0.636	0.665	0.644
23	Simeulue	0.617	0.787	0.785	0.718	0.806
	Average	0.591	0.589	0.598	0.621	0.612
	Regional disparities	0.297	0.265	0.256	0.270	0.255

Source: BPS (Central Bureau of Statistics)

Development Index) achieved is more than 0.597 (IDI > 0.597) and conversely the development of each region will be low if it is less than 0.597 (IDI < 0.597) (Fahmi et al., 2020). Although the average IDI Aceh score in 2019 was above 0.597, if we look at each region, for example, if we compare Langsa City with Aceh Besar, there is a very large inequality, namely 0.152 with 0.757. Inequality is certainly an obstacle in the effort to achieve prosperity. The existence of a special autonomy policy followed by fiscal transfers from the center to the regions does not seem to be followed by the capacity of the local government to manage all existing resources (Sukarniati & Lubis, 2021).

There is a gap in infrastructure development that is quite visible, and this is a unique character between urban vs urban or rural vs rural. This is

because the inequality that occurs is no longer based on regencies and cities, but in the current context between regencies and cities, competition remains open so that inequality no longer recognizes urban or rural boundaries. For example, IDI in Langsa City contrasts with Banda Aceh City. Even though both are considered cities, means they have an urban effect. In addition, it also occurred in the districts of Gayo Lues and Aceh Besar. The pattern of inequality in infrastructure development in Aceh is certainly an irony. Even though more than a decade of fiscal transfers tends to increase, it is not balanced with adequate fund management from the local government itself. In fact, infrastructure development can be carried out concurrently after the disbursement of special autonomy funds. This

is considering that infrastructure development will affect the movement of goods and services, increase the added value of the economy, encourage regional productivity, and ensure economic efficiency (Fahmi et al., 2020, p. 153).

The management of infrastructure development above basically contributes to the poverty level in Aceh, which is currently the region with the highest poverty rate on the island of Sumatra. This is corroborated by the findings of the Monitoring Committee for the Implementation of Regional Autonomy (KPPOD) which has conducted a study on the problem of poverty in Aceh. According to him, poverty in Aceh can be overcome if the special autonomy (otsus) funds are managed properly (Adinda, 2021). Mismanagement of special autonomy funds in Aceh is evidence that there is a distortion in the use of special autonomy funds. This confirms that in fact special autonomy, which was originally expected to solve problems in Aceh, has actually created a new problem in this case the management problem. The Center for Social and Cultural Sciences Research (PPISB) Syiah Kuala University (Unsyiah) Banda Aceh claims that the Aceh Government has failed to manage DOKA funds (Annisa, 2019). This means that special autonomy at the same time creates governance challenges for Aceh and tends to be enjoyed only by certain groups.

### C. DOKA's Future Amid Aceh's Paradox of Plenty

The presence of Aceh's special autonomy must respond to the heavy burden that has been attached to people's lives in Aceh. On the one hand, Aceh's special autonomy is required to be able to get Aceh out of the paradox of plenty situation which is still firmly attached. The second challenge is the issue of governance. The special autonomy which later gave birth to DOKA does have a gap for the establishment of governance distortions. With the escalation of the special autonomy fund which increases every year and is not proportional to the welfare index in Aceh, the management of DOKA has become an issue that automatically emerges as a representation of the failure of governance. Efforts to distort this special autonomy should be the attention of the Central Government to evaluate this situation as a whole. There is a tendency for the face of Aceh's special autonomy to be distorted if you look at the achievements that many parties claim to have failed. In fact, this special autonomy has become a very essential opportunity in the context of

being a catalyst for development in Aceh. Distortion and opportunity are two faces of special autonomy, and it depends on their achievements and management (Fiorillo et al., 2021).

Reflecting on the passage of two decades of Law No. 18 of 2001 concerning special autonomy for Aceh becomes very urgent. There must be a unified perception between the Central Government and Aceh that special autonomy is proof and commitment of the government in building a more prosperous Aceh. Departing from two decades of implementing Aceh's special autonomy which is still characterized by high poverty, a weak human development index, low infrastructure development, high economic inequality, high unemployment, and other problems, it will be important to design a more dynamic, transparent, and accountable management of this asymmetrical arrangement. These three principles do not seem to be visible in the implementation of this special autonomy. Therefore, tracing back the autonomy system as well as carrying out various system reforms seems to be important so that the system designed is truly capable of distributing the special autonomy arrangements that can be felt directly by the people of Aceh. The momentum for peace in Aceh between the Government of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) in 2006 gave birth to Law No. 11/2006 concerning the Government of Aceh which has special autonomy authority which is predicted as an opportunity that allows all regencies and cities in Aceh to rebuild their economy which was left behind during the conflict, in fact, is still full of complicated problems (Raza et al., 2018).

Critical reflection on the achievement of welfare in Aceh may become necessary. There need to be new breakthroughs in realizing the welfare narratives that have always been echoed by the government. Special autonomy in Aceh is nothing but a form of political ties between Jakarta and certain elites, so that the welfare of the people that should be touched is neglected. The strong political ties were able to create resistance that kept Aceh still in an undesirable situation. The large budget that goes into Aceh is not able to make Aceh out of the shackles of poverty (Dewi et al., 2018). The existence of a model for managing Aceh's special autonomy funds should also consider the aspirations and characteristics of the regions in Regencies/Cities in Aceh so that there is no overlap of authority (Ali, 2019). The government must really see that the

future of special autonomy is nothing but prosperity in Aceh. Although it is inevitable that there are political motives, welfare is the most important thing. The future of this special autonomy must be guarded and ensured that the people must feel this arrangement, not only felt by certain elite groups.

### **IV. Conclusion**

The presence of special autonomy has indeed made a difference for Aceh. However, the changes provided were not very encouraging for Aceh. The wealth of natural resources owned by Aceh is not able to bring Aceh to an ideal which is to become a region that has high welfare, low poverty, high HDI, and high IDI. The indications of the paradox of plenty to this day have not been able to escape from Aceh. The presence of special autonomy which is predicted to be able to realize the ideals of Aceh in a region that has a high level of welfare and the quality of life of its people has not been able to be achieved. This means that the burden of special autonomy has not been able to resolve the phenomenon of the paradox of plenty in Aceh. Interestingly, the presence of this special autonomy gave birth to new challenges in the line of governance. The disbursement of such large funds, and continues to be disbursed from 2008 to 2021, the total allocation of special autonomy funds received by Aceh Province has reached 88.43 trillion based on the report of the Directorate General of Fiscal Balance, Ministry of Finance 2021. However, ironically, it has not yet produced an encouraging development contribution for Aceh. Meanwhile, the management of special autonomy funds has not been optimal, with the remaining funds for Aceh's special autonomy in the 2013–2020 period amounting to 7.7 trillion. Various speculations over the failure of special autonomy that have been raised by many parties are not surprising. This is because many parties claim the failure of Aceh's special autonomy with insignificant achievements. The special autonomy fund management model, which tends to have a political face, is also still full of obstacles to welfare for Aceh. Of course, these various realities are critical reflections for all parties on the implementation of Aceh's special autonomy for two decades. Serious evaluation is important as well as reorganizing and re-designing this arrangement so that it is more directly accommodating to the growth of welfare in the lower classes of society.

In addition, this study also concludes that to date, Aceh's special autonomy has not been

optimally managed, so it has not been able to bring Aceh out of the challenges of the paradox of plenty phenomenon. This is certainly a contrast to the essence of the birth of special autonomy for the sake of prosperity in Aceh. Breaking the resistance to the ideal that natural resource wealth is able to bring prosperity to the people living around its natural resource wealth is certainly very difficult. For example, the problem of DOKA management does not lead to community welfare. However, the author also provides recommendations for efforts toward Aceh's prosperity. The first recommendation is that the issue of the paradox of plenty should be seen as a serious problem because it is correlated with the political economy of the region. The role of special autonomy which should play a role and function for the abundance of natural resources in Aceh has not been able to be realized so the paradox of plenty in Aceh is still a stumbling block in realizing prosperity. The second recommendation is that the government should immediately evaluate the implementation of special autonomy in a comprehensive and systematic manner to minimize the gaps in the distortion of this arrangement. The design of special autonomy which was then followed by the delegation of extraordinary fiscal capacity to Aceh made budgeting in Aceh very abundant, but unable to become an accelerator instrument for all backwardness. This means that there is a distortion of the goals that have not been achieved, namely welfare development. Various economic, social, political, educational, and health problems have not been resolved in these two decades and even Aceh is still a poor region on the island of Sumatra. This becomes necessary to be followed up considering that the output provided is not balanced with the input given. Therefore, optimal management of special autonomy funds is the key for Aceh to be able to remove the stigma of the paradox of plenty that is still happening.

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