

Humboldt development model used in Borneo

BY KERI DALMAN
JOURNAL EDITOR

It's long way from Humboldt to Borneo, but some ideas developed here have made the translation to the Indonesian island.

When the Estey Centre for Law and Economics in International Trade in Saskatoon began working with a community group in Humboldt on a plan for economic development in 2004, they had no idea that the ideas generated through their association would work just as well on the other side of the globe as they did here.

But it turns out the Humboldt Model of economic development, which came out of work between the Estey Centre and the group eventually known as Action Humboldt, does just that.

"What we did in Humboldt was a major modification from something we'd pioneered in small communities in Manitoba," said Wayne Robinson of the Estey Centre who visited Humboldt last week with James Leach, executive director of the Estey Centre.

What they did with Action Humboldt, which involved identifying the unique strengths of this region, then finding ways to capitalize on them, was a learning experience for the facilitators from the Estey Centre, Robinson noted.

"It perfected our idea of molding a program around the needs and personalities in a community," Robinson said. "We learned as much from Humboldt as Humboldt learned from us."

So much, that after discussions with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and Trisakti University in Jakarta, Indonesia, they decided to try out the Humboldt Model in that country.

The Estey Centre was engaged in trade policy training at the university when they started talking about what they'd done in Humboldt. People there then asked them if the model they'd used in Humboldt would work in Indonesia.

"We said we couldn't see why it wouldn't," Robinson said. "The idea is that (a plan for economic and community development) is molded around a community and the individuals involved. If it worked in Humboldt, why couldn't it work anywhere else?"

They then talked to CIDA about funding the delivery of the Humboldt Model at the university. CIDA, though, wanted the Estey Centre to test the waters first, to find one or two communities to deliver this Humboldt Model to, in order to see if it really did translate.

After a long search, they finally found two communities on the island of Borneo in the Central Kalimantan province of Indonesia — the capital city, Palangkaraya (about the size of Saskatoon) and smaller communities in the Katingen region.

Robinson, Leach and others from the Estey Centre presented the model to interested people — mostly economic development planners — in both of these communities through a translator. The people there liked the idea, and jumped on board, ready to come up with plans to help their communities.

The last of the training was delivered to people in both communities this past August, and the two groups are now working on their economic development plans, which do, indeed, reflect the individual regions.

One of their plans, Robinson said, involves building an aquarium as a tourist attraction to showcase the unique species of fish found in their area.

Another plan involves rattan, which the area already produces, but sends away for manufacturing into furniture. People in the area want to use the rattan produced there to make the furniture

themselves, and therefore, keep more money in the region.

The principles of the Humboldt model are definitely being successfully used in Borneo, the two smiled.

"It's a different language, and the culture is different, but it's the same principles, same brainstorming, the same exercises," Robinson said.

And if it works there, in another language, it can work anywhere, they said.

Leach and Robinson will be going back to Indonesia in February to finish the training program at the university, which is looking at developing larger projects on a larger economic scale, as other communities in the province have already said they want to do this, too.

This training is very much needed in the country right now, Robinson and Leach both feel. The now democratic government is in the process of decentralization at the moment, after two lengthy dictatorships. Instead of doling out money and orders to areas of the province, this new government is asking the people to tell them what they want to do, in order to receive funding.



Wayne Robinson (centre) of the Estey Centre leads a session for economic development officers from the Katingen region. The session very much resembled what was presented in Humboldt five years ago.

"So the Humboldt program is perfect for them," Robinson said.

The idea around the Humboldt Model, which is what the Estey Centre insists will remain the name, is that a community decides what it needs, and how to go forward to meet that need. It's not an outside person coming into the area, telling them what to do. The community makes the decisions themselves, with assistance from the Estey Centre.

The Estey Centre basically provides the format for the community to decide what its strategic advantages are, and advises them on how to gather information to ensure that the entire community is on board with their plan of action to capitalize on that advance.

"We provide the guidance and structure so the community can develop their plan," Leach noted. "It's driven by the people in the community, not us or the government."

"It's really participatory, which is what makes it unique," said Robinson.

Many times, he noted, when decisions about economic development are made, the person developing the plan is not really in touch with what everyone wants. The plan then revolves around the desires of select individuals or people with vested interests in certain fields.

When there's no community ownership of the plan, which is what usually results when it doesn't reflect what everyone wants, it tends to sit on the shelf and collect dust, Robinson indicated.

In using the Humboldt model, "the people creating the plan buy in because



James Leach (second from left) and Wayne Robinson (second from right) of the Estey Centre for Law and Economics in International Trade with their partners at Trisakti University in Indonesia.

photos courtesy the Estey Centre

it's their plan — it's not dictated by a city council or mayor," Robinson said.

And the political leaders like it, too — they like the fact, Robinson said, that people are coming to them with what they think should be done, and how to do it.

"They're getting feedback from the

Humboldt and region is a growing thriving hub in Saskatchewan. New families are moving in and business is expanding. Quality education and business opportunities are valued and available. This region's success is used as an economic development model for Western Canada."

The only error Robinson sees is in the last statement.

"I'd say (the success will be used as an economic development model for) the world," he smiled.

Though much success has been achieved, it appears neither Action Humboldt nor the Estey Centre are finished with this region yet. The two are looking at more training, this time to create a vision and a plan for a completely healthy community, not just economically, but when it comes to education, health care and a whole variety of other things.

"We want to break new ground with Humboldt," Robinson said.

This region is growing rapidly, which makes this the perfect time for Humboldt to recreate a vision about the determinants of a healthy community.

"The economic growth is going on and will probably continue. We want to make sure that... there's good health care, education and infrastructure in place... so people are healthy, happy and hearty," Robinson stated.

Barrie Broad, the chair of Action Humboldt, confirmed that the group is looking at further training in this area, and have applied to the Rural Secretariat for funding, as that department funded the training before.

"This is an extension of what we did before," Broad said. And with most of the things on their "to do" list accomplished, they feel it's now time to build on what we've got, and address the potential that's still out there.

The training will likely start sometime in early 2010, he noted.



The production of rattan furniture from the rattan crops grown on Borneo is one of the plans the people there have developed to further develop their economy.