



Harnessing the Power of Indonesian Diaspora

I was recently invited to speak at the Congress of Indonesian Diaspora in Los Angeles. The congress, a first, aims to connect the millions of Indonesian diaspora around the world for the betterment of Indonesia. Unlike the Chinese or Indian diaspora, the Indonesian diaspora is akin to millions of unconnected dots whose social, economic and brain powers have largely been untapped. The congress hopes to boost better social, economic and professional links between Indonesia and the world.

I met a lot of smart, impressive and successful diaspora at the congress. Their backgrounds are diverse and include students, artists, educators, professionals, businesspeople and innovators. One in particular stood out for his truly inspiring story: Sehat Sutardja, the self-made billionaire cofounder and chief executive of Marvell Technology, the world's third-largest fabless semiconductor company, headquartered in Silicon Valley.

Sehat holds masters and doctoral degrees in electrical engineering and computer science from the University of California Berkeley. Sehat has been awarded more than 260 patents and was the recipient of the Ernst & Young "Entrepreneur of the Year" award. He has leveraged his technological acumen and relationships with world leaders to expand access to technology for developing nations. I had the honor to sit down with Sehat and discussed various topics, including his thoughts on the future of technology in Indonesia and how Indonesia can leverage the power of its diaspora in its advancement.

To me, Sehat is the personification of not just the American dream, but also the Indonesian dream. His passion and fascination with electronics began early. He became a certified radio repair technician at age 13. One day his dad's radio broke down, and Sehat promised he would fix it. After tinkering with it for a while, Sehat thought the radio was fixed—it was not. Refusing to give up, Sehat spent almost a year trying to fix it.

Every day he would spend time to fix the radio. He



Sehat Sutardja


tried everything—from building the proper test equipment to buying manuals on how to fix the radio's parts. Nothing seemed to work, but Sehat viewed this as a challenge and finally figured it out: a faulty transistor was the cause of the failure and he eventually fixed it.

That early lesson stayed with him for a long time. When he faced much larger problems during his advanced studies and journey in Silicon Valley, he always applied the same basic principles: never give up, keep your word, try everything and go back to basics. In a world where promises are often

broken and most look only for instant gratification, these are lessons that will serve everyone well.

Sehat believes Indonesia has the opportunity to leapfrog to a knowledge-based economy by adapting the most advanced technology that has been developed to make the world a better place. Indonesia can accelerate development by skipping inferior, less efficient, more expensive and sometimes non-environmentally friendly technologies and move directly to more advanced ones. As more Indonesians get connected digitally, it will help the country harness the full potential of its citizens and diaspora anywhere.

The concept of diaspora is not new as Indonesia's ancestors came from other parts of the world tens of thousands years ago. Moreover, throughout history, the Indonesian people have migrated around the world for trade, education and family reasons. Now is the perfect time for Indonesia to harness the power of its diaspora to reverse the brain drain into a brain gain. With its knowledge, skills, capital and network, the Indonesian diaspora are a hidden power.

Sehat is the embodiment of the spirit of excellence all Indonesians, at home and abroad, should aim for. Despite his remarkable success, he stays humble and idealistic. His love for Indonesia is unwavering. Sehat is actively helping guide Indonesia around technology's pivotal role in the country's next phase of development. If Indonesia were to succeed as a leader in the 21st century, we need to connect and harness more people like Sehat. Let's keep this momentum going. 

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