

# Starting from education

Sukanto Tanoto, 59, has set up the Tanoto Foundation to mobilize sources of finance to help Indonesian people improve their lives. Education is the starting point to achieve his goal. **By Albertus Weldison Nonto**

**D**O A SEARCH ON GOOGLE FOR "Tanoto Foundation" and you will find around 12,000 results. Compare that with a similar search on "Ford Foundation", which gets 31,000 results, and its clear the Indonesian foundation is not quite in the same league.

Apart from scale, the two foundations have much in common: they exist to provide funds to help people to improve their lives.

Sukanto Tanoto's philanthropy in fact dates back well before his business became as big as it is today. Beginning in 1978, he was sponsoring students from time to time in areas in Sumatra where his company operates.

No firm figures are available on the amount of money that Sukanto has given away over the years. Sources within his company state, however, that he spends around Rp10 billion (\$910,000) every year for a range of humanitarian activities.

Sukanto has a simple reason for his philanthropy. "I can feel the sadness of those who are eager to study but do not have the money. In 1966, during the Indonesian Communist Party's 30 September Movement, I could not continue my study because I had to work to help my parents," he is on record as saying.

"At the time, life was very difficult. I want to help successful children who have strong determination to achieve their ambitions," Sukanto says.

According to the executive director of the Tanoto Foundation, Ratih S.A. Lukito, the foundation, along with the Tanoto family, aims to increase quality of life for the Indonesian people by reducing poverty.

For Sukanto, development of the education sector by supporting talented students

financially will create a long-term benefit for society. A good education allows people to increase their quality of life, he believes.

The owner of privately held multinational company Raja Garuda Mas over the past 20 years has allocated 80% of his donations to the education sector and 20% for other social welfare activities.

Overall, over the past two years, the Tanoto Foundation has donated around Rp20 billion for all its social activities.

According to Ratih, the foundation works mainly in three sectors: scholarships for smart students from low-income families; teacher development programs for elementary and junior high school teachers; and research funding for universities.

Tanoto Foundation or Yayasan Bhakti Tanoto was formally established in 2002, but Sukanto has worked quietly for a better Indonesia since 1978.

Many scholarships have been provided to students from Sumatra, and assistance was given to the Olympic Physics Team (TOFI) to create a fund to assist winners to pursue their ambitions. The foundation continues to provide funds for research and capability building at TOFI.

A switch to a professional structure in 2005 was necessitated by the increasing complexities of Sukanto's philanthropic activities. "Professionals organize all activities, prepare standard operating procedures and determine criteria for recipients," says Ratih.

## No debt to company

THE RESULT IS CLEAR. SINCE ITS INCEPTION the foundation has provided scholarships for more than 300 undergraduates and 50 at master degree level. It works closely with

six universities: the Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB), Gaja Madha University (UGM), the University of Indonesia, the Bogor Agricultural Institute, the University of North Sumatra and the Riau University.

The candidates who receive awards may study any subject and are not bound in any way to Sukanto's companies.

The foundation believes that all academic disciplines should be treated equally, says Ratih, and does not believe students should be tied in any way.

Scholarships provide full payment of tuition fees and a monthly stipend. Undergraduates receive a payment of Rp3 million at the beginning of each semester and a stipend of Rp500,000 a month. Master degree candidates are given Rp15 million at the beginning of the semester and Rp1.2 million a month.

Two professors are also funded by the foundation for research in sciences with a direct bearing on Sukanto's business. Herry Susanto, a professor from ITB, received Rp1.2 billion for his research project on the improvement of biomass gasification techniques for alternative energy.

The other funded professor is Gaja Madha's Widyastuti, who won a research grant of the same size early this year to study genoderma fungus, which causes the roots of plants to decompose.

## Creative teachers

WITH ITS TEACHER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM, the foundation has already conducted three sessions for more than 150 elementary to junior high school teachers from Sumatra and Kalimantan.

The first phase of the training was conducted at schools at Meulaboh in Aceh and



Sukanto Tanoto

Nias in North Sumatra. Each training unit takes a full six months.

The foundation plans to conduct similar training programs in a number of other areas of Indonesia, aiming to increase the creativity of teachers and help them develop their teaching styles.

The program was designed by Ratih's own team, with the assistance of experienced trainers in curriculum and teaching development programs.

"Our goal is to promote and boost teaching creativity by using for example the application of democratic principles in class or using local resources to support the teaching process. We believe that by boosting creativity, the teachers will enrich their lives even without big budgets," Ratih says.

Masri, a teacher at a school in a remote area of Riau who participated in the first training program, learned a lot from the experience. The program taught him

that discipline can be established easily in the class room by inviting the pupils to set rules that are approved by all students.

The results are visible, says Masri. The average mark of students in his classes has gone from four last year to six this year. Another teacher from Aceh says he was able to access supplies of waste paper which helped him to deliver material in class in a more interesting way.

Ratih stresses that the training programs do not deviate from government models, but augment them. Outside of formal sessions, participants are invited to develop teaching modules based on the training material.

At the end of the course the Tanoto Foundation team evaluates all participants to find the best graduates, who are then invited to join the next program to share their experiences with the newcomers.

Isep Supriyatna, a pharmacy student at

UGM, says he was delighted to win a foundation scholarship last year. His parents died when he was still young, and funding his studies was difficult.

Ratih says she believes Sukanto is sincere in his desire to improve conditions in the education sector. She believes he hopes the foundation will become a monument to the family. Sukanto is preparing his son to take control of it in the future, a sign that Ratih believes proves the tycoon's sincerity.

Not everyone agrees. One Jakarta business analyst sees Tanoto's good works as a way of cleaning up his bad reputation, the result of alleged deforestation around his company plants, as well as a bad debt problem with a local bank.

Ratih denies that the foundation and Sukanto's donations are motivated by anything other than a desire to help, and believes the public will be able to evaluate Sukanto's record and reach their own judgment. **GA**