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The Hegemony of International Interests on IFRS Adoption in Indonesia: an Accounting Ecology Perspective

Hamidah^{a*}, Iwan Triyuwono^b, Eko Ganis Sukoharsono^c, Ali Djamhuri^d

^aAccounting, Lecturer of Airlangga University, PhD Student at University of Brawijaya, Airlangga #4, 60286, Surabaya, Indonesia

^{bcd}Accounting, University of Brawijaya, MT Haryono #165, 65145, Malang, Indonesia

Abstract

The study aims to uncover the actor and political interests behind the adoption of International Financial Reporting Standard (IFRS) in Indonesia. Using the accounting ecology framework developed by Gernon and Wallace (1995), this study examines the reason of why Indonesia adopts IFRS. The study finds that the adoption of IFRS in Indonesia is driven by international interests. Indonesia's membership in IFAC, IOSCO, and the G-20 has resulted in Indonesia approved the use of global accounting standards.

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1. Introduction

Indonesia Financial Accounting Standards Board (DSAK-IAI) in 2012 announced that Indonesia adopts International Financial Reporting Standard (IFRS). The adoption has an implication on the compliance of all accounting standards and practices on the principles, norms, and values embraced by IFRS. The adoption and implementation of IFRS in Indonesia as a developing country are very interesting to note and observe. Various perspectives can be used to see the adoption. This study aims to uncover the economic and political interests of why Indonesia adopts IFRS. Gernon and Wallace's (1995) ecological theory of accounting is used as an instrument of

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +628123049749; fax: +62315026288.
E-mail address: hamidah@feb.unair.ac.id

analysis to expose the interests.

Alsharairi (2005) conducted an explorative case study on the adoption of International Accounting Standard (IAS) in Jordan under the perspective of accountants, auditors, and academics. He demonstrated that the adoption of IAS had important impacts on the political environment, economic and social institutions in Jordan. He suggested that the various circumstances existed among countries should be taken into account to adopt a standard, and the adoption should be done by testing its conformance and effect on the countries before the standard was applied. Alsharairi (2005) was in doubt whether the standard drafted by the International Accounting Standard Board (IASB) was still relevant or not, even though we have already known that the standard was primarily issued for the interests of the countries with highly developed capital markets such as the UK and the US and for adding economic value to the countries that adopted the standard.

Different conditions in developed and developing countries are clearly indicated by the dynamic condition and development of capital markets and the number of multinational companies. If the adoption of IFRS is imposed to developing countries that have different circumstances with developed countries, then the added value gained is not proportional to the resources sacrificed. Tyrrell, Woodman, and Rakhimbekova (2007) examined the relevance and implementation of IFRS for emerging economies with a case study of Kazakhstan. They argued that IFRS was a standard created by and for the interests of developed countries. Despite the fact that until now the standard has been widely adopted by developing countries, they argued that developing countries mostly neglected the economic relevance and suitability of the adoption. In the context of a company or national level, Choi and Mueller (1984) named it as 'standard overload'. It was because of, according to Belkaoui (2004), a company's efforts to comply with IFRS was in excess of what the company needed.

Chand and White (2007) conducted a study to identify the reasons underlying the decision taken by the Fijian Institute of Accountants to apply IFRS in financial statements that were presented as of July 1, 2002. They concluded that the adoption of IFRS in Fiji could produce a transfer of economic resources only for private benefits of big multinational corporations and international public accounting firms, not for public interests. There are suspicions in which the issuance of IFRS was actually an attempt of some parties to direct and control financial information of world business for their own sake. The purpose of this study is to uncover the veil of the fact that the adoption of IFRS is driven by a strong current of globalization, which ignores the real need of accounting information in the country. The adoption of IFRS is due to the dominance of international organisations that ensnares their members (including Indonesia) to participate in supporting the widespread use of IFRS as a single global standard.

2. Theoretical Framework

Theory of Accounting Ecology is used to analyze the research issue. Gernon and Wallace (1995) stated that there are five different environmental variables that affect accounting, i.e., societal, organisational, individual, professional and accounting. Accounting ecology refers to a multidimensional system related to one another. Each system has environmental sub-systems that influences, and are influenced by, accounting (Gernon and Wallace, 1995). Gernon and Wallace (1995) define 'accounting ecology' for as follows:

“A national accounting ecology is a multidimensional system in which no one factor occupies a predominant position and in which the perceptions held by actors on some unfolding accounting phenomena, as well as the accounting phenomena themselves, are the object of study and analysis. Such a synthesis would emphasize the interrelationships of the environmental factors which influence and are influenced by accounting and would focus on the importance of perceptual as well as non-cultural factors such as population and land area.” (Gernon and Wallace, 1995. p. 59).

The concept of ecological accounting includes five interacting separate parts: First, the societal slice. This slice is associated with the element of culture and non-culture (demographic and structural) in a society that can affect a demand of financial accounting services (Gernon and Wallace, 1995). Cultural variables affect the value and orientation of individuals and groups, both within and outside the organisation, the profession, the council and the government of the accounting standards.

Second, the organisational slice. This slice refers to the organisation of events and/or trends that lead to

rationalization in the selection and design of accounting systems such as the organisation size, technology, complexity, and human resources and capital (Gernon and Wallace, 1995).

Third, the professional slice. It relates to education, training, professional ethics and culture (Gernon and Wallace, 1995). It is also associated with the quality and the failure of audit, audit fees and auditor's effectiveness and status in society.

Fourth, the individual slice. Ecology of individuals refers to accounting policy choices made by individuals and any actions that delivered by an individual, an organisation, and a profession in an attempt to lobby the accounting standard setters for their own interests (Gernon and Wallace, 1995).

Fifth, the accounting slice. It denotes to accounting practices, regulations and/or trends that affect, or are affected by, other slice in ecological accounting (Gernon and Wallace, 1995). It includes the requirements of the practice disclosure, measurement, practice, type and frequency of accounting report.

3. Research Method

This study attempts to disclose the issue of how the adoption of IFRS in Indonesia according to accounting ecological perspective. According to Creswell et al. (2007), this kind of research issue can be classified as an in-depth research. It is suitable when the study uses a case study method (Creswell et al., 2007).

Data are collected by using combination of documents and interviews. Structured and in-depth interviews are conducted. The informants of the research are the members of DSAK. They are very competent on this area. They are chosen as informants based on criteria that they are active at the time before the adoption of IFRS (before 2012). Some of them are also the former members and chairman of KNPAP (*Komite Nasional Prinsip Akuntansi Indonesia*) and the members and chairman of national board of the Indonesian Institute of Accountants (DPN-IAI). Some informants are also from government institutions, such as Indonesian Capital Market and Financial Institution Supervisory Agency (BAPEPAM-LK), the Ministry of Finance, and Ministry of State-owned Enterprises.

To analyze data, the study utilizes qualitative method developed by Miles and Huberman (1994). Miles and Huberman (1994) argue that qualitative data analysis is done in an interactive manner continuously until reaching complete and saturation data. The activities of analyzing data, according to Miles and Huberman (1994), include data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion. However, for the purpose of having a detailed stage, we use a thematic analysis method to support existing method.

4. Findings

Under the perspective of accounting ecology, this study exposes that there are three main slices that ultimately induce Indonesia to adopt IFRS. They are individual (actor) slice, societal (political) slice, and organizational (business) slice. This finding is inconsistent with the theory of accounting ecology of Gernon and Wallace (1995) which classifies the accounting ecology into five slices, i.e. societal, organisational, professional, individual, and accounting slices.

Individual (actor) related slice illustrates the importance of an individual's role, both as a person or organisation, in lobbying accounting standard setter and using accounting numbers to fulfil his/her own personal benefits and his/her group. This study finds that HK (as a chairman of KNPAP) does not only take an action to lobby accounting standard setters, but also to make a decision. As a standard policy maker, he does not have any difficulties to make a decision on adopting the standard. As a chairman of KNPAP, HK, has a powerful control on directing accounting standards.

Indonesia, at the first time, launched accounting standards in 1973. At that time the standards were very simple and function as guidelines to prepare financial reports. For twenty years Indonesia adopted American version of generally accepted accounting practices (US GAAP). Actually, there were two options for Indonesia, i.e., Dutch-oriented standard or American-oriented standard. Even though Dutch has colonized Indonesia for three and half centuries, Indonesian accounting standard setter preferred to have American-oriented. This is because of not many Indonesian people, including accountants, who master Dutch language.

In 1994, there has been a shift of standard orientation in Indonesia, i.e., from America to Europe. In the second period of leadership in the Committee of *Prinsip Akuntansi Indonesia* (PAI), HK has successfully changed the

orientation of accounting standard in Indonesia, from US GAAP (FASB) to IFRS (IASB). The implication of this change is: accounting standard setter changed the name of the standard, from *Prinsip Akuntansi Indonesia* (PAI) (Indonesia Accounting Principles) to *Standar Akuntansi Keuangan* (SAK) (Financial Accounting Standards).

The reason of shifting accounting standards from America to Europe was exposed by ERW (head of accounting standard, BAPEPAM). He said that in 1994, BAPEPAM got a loan from World Bank for a project to improve Indonesia accounting standards. ERW expressed:

“Yes, we started to switch PAI to IAS in 1994. Previously we had PAI, then BAPEPAM got some money from World Bank to support issuers to prepare financial statements. That’s why our financial accounting standard had orientation to international accounting standards [IAS].”

The fact was the same as the experience of HK when HK at the first time raised the issue of shifting accounting standard from FASB to IASB in 1994. At that time HK said:

“So in the 1990s, I said to IAI, I asked permission to hold a massive national seminar for two days on... the field of accounting. I only wanted to discuss the financial accounting standards. At that time, many colleagues were wondering, why? It's time to change...[because of] globalization. I asked permission from my office to concentrate on, [and dedicate my time to] IAI [Indonesian Institute of Accountants]. If the funds from World Bank have not been transferred, I didn’t want to wait. I asked for my office to lend us some money first... and they said okay.”

Based on HK’s statement, it is clear that one of big four accounting firms in which HK is a partner was even ready to provide a bailout to ease the way of shifting accounting standard. Other informant, JH, believed that HK has already got information from BAPEPAM regarding the World Bank project on an endeavour to change accounting standards in Indonesia. That is why HK was so optimistic to change the orientation of accounting standards in Indonesia. In this context, JH told us: "It was quite possible that HK was already well informed [about the project], because he was [a partner of] a big accounting firm. He was powerful, because [in spite of a lecturer at a very popular state-owned university in Jakarta] he was also a partner of big accounting firm... as we know, his accounting firm had a very closed relationship with BAPEPAM." A closed relationship with BAPEPAM is based on the fact that companies listed in Indonesia Stock Exchange (which is under the control of BAPEPAM) are mostly the clients of HK’s accounting firm. He had a strong influence of some parties to adopt his idea.

Based on the data, it is obvious that the role of an actor is very significant to change accounting standards. The key actor, in this context is HK, was a founding father of an accounting firm that was grouped in the big four in Indonesia. The data have also disclosed that listed companies in Indonesia Stock Exchange (IDX) were mostly his clients. Thus, it is not difficult to lobby the clients, and even persons in accounting standard setter, BAPEPAM, Ministry of Finance, and Ministry of State-owned Enterprises to support the adoption of international accounting standards. According to the theory of accounting ecology, an actor personally and organisationally can lobby accounting standard setters to fulfil his/her-own interests. This study demonstrates that HK, the actor, indeed has done some activities and through his negotiation, finally he could change accounting standards in Indonesia. He utilized his power as head of KNPAI to persuade other parties to adopt international accounting standards.

New orientation of Indonesia accounting standards has made economic benefits for HK as the actor and initiator of the IFRS adoption. Since 2012 Indonesia has applied IFRS-based accounting standards and enforced all listing companies in IDX to apply the standards. The policy had a positive implication on the need of audit service especially for HK, because most of the listing companies were the former clients of HK’s accounting firm. The policy increased the demand of service audit. Other services in the areas of such as accounting, information system, and tax were also highly demanded by the companies as the consequence of the IFRS-based accounting standards. The condition gave rise to a positive impact on the demand of HK’s firm service. Additionally, personal reputation of HK as the founder of a respectable accounting firm in Indonesia (that was grouped as the Big Four of World Accounting Firms) made a higher dependence on HK’s accounting firm.

International accounting standards are basically the tactics of international accounting firms especially that are already grouped in the Big Four to expand their market shares. In applying the international standards that are apparently different with the local standards, national companies undoubtedly needs the service of international

accounting firms.

This study discloses that the adoption of IFRS in Indonesia is strongly influenced by (economic)-political pressure from international parties. In the perspective of accounting ecology, a political slice is in a location of societal environment. This slice illustrates how the political interests of certain parties influence the development of accounting. This political interest attempts to spread the intention of implementing of global standards for the benefit of certain parties. This study found that the adoption of IFRS in Indonesia due to political pressure of international organisations.

IFRS is one form of global governance with a certain objective i.e., to implement globally a single accounting standard. This policy has fostered the development of conglomerates' businesses in a wide range of financial services, such as banking, securities, derivatives, and insurance. The development of financial services is incorporated with the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision, or the International Organisation of Securities Commissions (IOSCO). Braithwaite and Drahos (2000) argued that IOSCO has been working with the International Accounting Standards Committee (IASC) to develop joint accounting standards that applicable to securities firms and go public companies (Koenig-Archibugi, 2003).

It is worthwhile to note that IFRS as one form of governance arrangements are controlled by IOSCO through IASB. The objective is to enforce all countries over the world to adopt global accounting standards that basically for the interest of a number of conglomerates. IASB, according Mattli and Buthe (2006), is a non-governmental organisation (private agents) that responsible for setting accounting standards globally. Related to this, a question can be raised: are there any parties that have powerful influence on IASB in setting international accounting standards? As we know, there are two principals that affect IASB, i.e., public sector principals (SEC, IOSCO, WTO, G7, World Bank, IMF) and private sector principals (the board of trustees of IASC Foundation). The strength of the principals' influence depends on how much money they contribute to IASB. IASB may put its concern on the party that contributes a higher amount of money (Mattli and Buthe, 2006). IASB's funds come from various sources, such as multinational corporations and big four accounting firms. This fact lead us to a perception that the process of setting standards is not purely objective, because IASB is influenced by the interests of multinational corporations and accounting firms.

This study finds that public sector principals had played an important role in the adoption of IFRS in Indonesia for fulfilling their interests. As the initiator in setting international accounting standards, IASB made collaboration with IOSCO, G-20 and IFAC to enforce the application of international accounting standards over the world. Various strategies have been done by IASB that finally entrap Indonesia to participate in adopting IFRS.

IOSCO agreed to take a larger role in the IFRS adoption. The decision was taken after the chairman of the IFRS Foundation Trustees encouraged the board of IOSCO to participate actively in global endeavours to implement IFRS (IOSCO, 2005). As a member of IOSCO, Indonesia also has an obligation to cooperate in developing, promoting, and implementing accounting standards, including the application of IFRS. The following statement was uttered by ERW:

Indeed, as a member of IOSCO, we are also like that... BAPEPAM as a member of IOSCO seems to be the same as G-20. We're recommended to use high-quality accounting standards i.e., IFRS. Shortly, we should follow IFRS.

The obligation to employ the standards is written in an official agreement that binds all members of IOSCO. The agreement officially states:

The member agencies of IOSCO have agreed to: cooperate in developing, implementing and promoting adherence to internationally recognised and consistent standards of regulation, oversight and enforcement in order to protect investors, maintain fair, efficient and transparent markets, and seek to address systemic risks.

Through SMO (Statement of Membership) No. 7 about the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS), IFAC obliges its members to adopt IFRS. Despite of enforcing members to adopt IFRS, IFAC members are also obliged to support all works of IASB to always do its best to provide information and understanding of IFRS to all members. Indonesia as a member of IFAC inevitably also must comply with the SMO. In this respect, AH pointed out that "IAI should adopt IFRS to maintain its membership in IFAC. If IAI quits from IFAC, then it means IAI and

Indonesia will be isolated from the world accounting practices and discourses.”

IASB has also formed a partnership with IFAC in the form of a MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) that basically regulates the cooperation to compile the international financial reporting standards (IFRS) on behalf of the public interest. The standards were claimed to have high quality and had a power to improve global financial reporting, and finally to promote and encourage the adoption and implementation of the international accounting standards (IFRS).

The membership of Indonesia in G-20 has enforced Indonesia to comply with the agreements made by the organisation. G-20 summit in Pittsburg has stated a communiqué that accounting authorities should double the use of global accounting standards (IFRS) in June 2011. The communiqué stated:

We call on our international accounting bodies to redouble their efforts to achieve a single set of high quality, global accounting standards within the context of their independent standard setting process, and complete their convergence project by June 2011. The International Accounting Standards Board's (IASB) institutional framework should further enhance the involvement of various stakeholders (G-20, 2009).

There is a finding that connects an actor slice with a political slice. This study disclosed that HK as the actor has taken political action to meet his interest, i.e., to maintain and to increase the amount of companies listed in IDX to his firm's clients. Personally, he has a strong power to lobby accounting standard setter, BAPEPAM, IDX, and other government organisation to adopt IFRS.

A business slice refers to event and/or trend that lead to rationalization in choosing and designing accounting systems, such as the organisation size, technology, complexity, human resources, and capital (Gernon and Wallace, 1995). The business environment determines the form and content of the information needed and therefore will help to shape the framework, rules and practices of financial reporting. This study reveals that the adoption of IFRS in Indonesia is driven to meet the needs of the international business environment.

The major concern of the proponents of single global accounting standards was to unite the worldwide capital markets. This mission was stated in a statement “interconnected financial market.” (IFRS Foundation, 2009). For the proponents, it is logical to support the implementation of international accounting standards, because the standards facilitate international transactions (Eccher & Healy, 2000). A company in a certain country may invest its funds in other country. Thus, it is hard to practice accounting only based on each country's local accounting standards. Global markets need for a single global accounting standard to facilitate global transactions.

To accelerate global market and finance, some accounting institutions were established both locally and globally. This study found a number of inter-related institutions that were found to support the adoption of IFRS as global accounting standards. As the founder and developer of global accounting standards, IASB makes collaboration with other international organizations to pave the desire that used IFRS as the only accounting standards in the world. The international organizations in cooperation with the IASB are IOSCO, IFAC, G20. They were established to foster a convergence of international accounting standards to achieve a mission of interconnected financial markets.

The adoption of IFRS in Indonesia was stimulated by collaboration between IASB with some trans-national organisations (political related ecology) which have the same mission i.e., an interconnecting global capital market (business related ecology). The mission is supported by the big four public accounting firms (actor related ecology) in the form of funding IASB for sum of money. By doing so, the international accounting standards can be easily set and the big four group may have benefits on it.

4. Conclusion

This study exposes that the adoption of IFRS in Indonesia covers three slices, namely: business related ecology, actor related ecology, and political related ecology. These slices are not exactly the same as Gernon and Wallace's (1995) that consists of societal, organisational, professional, individual, and accounting slices. This is reasonable, because the context of this study may be different with Gernon and Wallace (1995).

The adoption of IFRS is induced by external and internal forces. International organisations that work together to support global market are the external force that cannot be avoided by Indonesia accounting standard setter to adopt

IFRS. The membership in the organisations has entrapped Indonesia in the web of global market and globalization of accounting standard. Thus, there is no choice for Indonesia to adopt IFRS. (Un)fortunately, the adoption was strongly initiated and supported by an Indonesian individual who has personal and organisational interests. The individual finally has successfully driven Indonesia accounting standard setter to adopt and practice IFRS-based accounting standards. This is the internal force that realizes the adoption of the IFRS.

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