

Interview by Jemma Purdey with Ahmad Agus Setiawan, Yogyakarta, 26 May 2014

Phd, Environmental Engineering, Curtin University, 2004-2008



[00:00:43]	Born and raised in Jogjakarta until finished electrical engineering at Gajah Mada University (UGM) in 1999. Started at UGM in 1993 and would have finished in 1998 but felt he shouldn't just think about himself while there was such turmoil in Indonesia and wanted to contribute to his country, joined the Special Students and Alumni Force and was deployed in Gunung Kidul for seven months, and finished his course in August 1999. [Elaborates on this.]	Childhood; Undergraduate education; Community service
[00:04:47]	After finishing his degree he joined the new engineering physics department, focusing on renewable energy, as a junior lecturer. Already had an interest in renewable energy after seeing technologies at Gunung Kidul and pursued it with his master's and PhD studies.	Early career
[00:06:53]	Came from a very poor family, his father was a labourer and his mother did whatever she could. When he was ten his parents separated and he lived with his mother. He had no siblings. He went to the local state school and dreamt of going to university. His teachers supported his ambition with small scholarships when they could, UGM also helped him with a small scholarship to help with his living costs. He also worked for the faculty of forestry. The house he lived in with his mother, only a few minutes from the university, didn't have electricity then but when his colleagues in forestry learned this, in 1995, they raised the money to have power connected.	Childhood; Family background; Early education; Scholarships opportunities
[00:11:07]	One of the senior people in the faculty became Agus's mentor, and still is. He advised Agus to work for money as well as using the scholarship so he would have a sense of earning what he	Mentoring; Scholarship opportunities

	gets. His mentor encourages him to be a mentor to other people and he has done that in his managerial roles. [Story about helping students, and one in particular, who are struggling.]	
[00:18:48]	His mother didn't finish high school but she encouraged Agus to get an education even though she couldn't support him financially. When he finished high school he considered applying for a scholarship to study overseas but his grandmother discouraged him and said he would get the opportunity to study overseas later but should study at home first, and she was right. It was hard at the time but he's glad now.	Family background; Scholarship opportunities
[00:22:03]	His mother brought him up to have faith and work hard. He remembers praying with his mother in their bamboo house with the rain dripping in and asking why. His time at Gunung Kidul gave him new perspectives. [Story about students going on placement to rural areas and his trying to help them to accept and appreciate their circumstances.]	Family; Community service
[00:27:03]	While an undergraduate he used to visit industry in Jakarta but he dreamed of an academic life, teaching and doing community service. He needed to have a master's and got a scholarship, through UGM, to the Royal Institute of Technology in Sweden. Two of his seniors were already there. It was his first overseas trip and Sweden was totally different to Indonesia.	Undergraduate education; Community service; Scholarship opportunities; International mobility
[00:30:39]	His English wasn't that good then, the Swedish scholarship didn't include any pre-departure training. He was accepted around March and had to go in September, did some English conversation classes before he left. He had only travelled to Jakarta and Madura, never overseas. Going to Sweden opened up everything for him, he felt anything was possible.	Scholarship experience; International mobility
[00:34:02]	The course was nine months and he had six or seven months when he could have gone home to do research but decided to stay and do research in Sweden. His son was born 20 days after he left for Sweden, on 20 September 2000. He was married in 1999. While in Sweden he sent half the scholarship money home to his wife. He lived with another Indonesian student. He stayed in Sweden to get more experience and worked on a project about renewable energy – wind and solar – and could network with people from all over the world.	Living overseas; Family; Scholarship experience; Professional network
[00:38:47]	The networks helped in 2006 when he was	Professional network

	studying in Australia. [Elaborates on his PhD project and how his networks enabled his research.]	
[00:41:42]	Didn't meet his son until he was 18 months old. It was hard but he did it for his family. It was hard for his wife too but she accepted it, had family support in Yogja. They had a daughter soon after he returned. The family came with him when he went to Australia. He only applied for scholarships that accommodated family – ADS and a German one – and the Australian one came through first.	Family; Scholarship opportunities
[00:46:07]	He was accepted in 2002, did three months English in Jakarta and went in January 2004. His wife and children joined him after a couple of months. His son was four and his daughter was nearly one. [Story about another student, the son of a government minister.]	Scholarship experience; Pre-departure training; Arriving in Australia
[00:50:03]	ADS helped with visas and everything, most other scholarships don't. There was another three months of training in Sydney. Agus would recommend doing an Australian scholarship first, before going somewhere else because of the training and experience. Chose to go to UNSW because they're very advanced in solar cell technology. After ten months he moved to Curtin University because he wanted to do research that could be used in Indonesia at that time – application of solar technology rather than focus on solar materials and policy development.	Scholarship experience; Studying in Australia; Challenges
[00:57:06]	UNSW didn't want him to go. He looked for someone well known doing a big project and found that at Curtin. He let everyone, the universities and ADS, know and facilitated the change himself. A friend of his had negotiated a similar change and gave him advice.	Studying in Australia; Challenges
[01:01:43]	It was hard, moving the family again. In Sydney they lived in Anzac Parade, in front of UNSW and it was all perfect. Very glad he could change or he may not have continued. [Discussion about doing the PhD you want or doing one that someone else wants.] Was at Curtin, in Perth, for four years. The Indonesian community helped them settle in, especially a friend who had done language training with him. He was very stressed in Sydney, with family and study responsibilities, and fearful for a while, at Curtin, that things might not work out but they did.	Family; Living in Australia; Challenges; Indonesian community in Perth

[01:06:05]	In 2006 and 2007, he was happy with his research but his supervisor decided to move to India. It was a big blow but turned out OK. [Story about his supervisor's projects.]	Studying in Australia; Challenges
[01:09:35]	They didn't have a car, got around by bike and bus. Every weekend they went on a trip, around Perth and to Fremantle and Albany. He felt guilty having to work so hard so made sure he could do things with the family on weekends. His son did kindergarten to Year 2 and his daughter until to Year 1. Their English was good but they don't use it much now. Australian schools were good and the children liked it. He encouraged his wife to use public transport by herself, she knew how to get around better than him in the end.	Living in Australia; Travelling in Australia; Family
[01:14:17]	He felt sorry for the children when they went back to Indonesia, with the testing at school, but they adjusted OK. Going back was fine for him and his wife. It was exciting to have a good research grant to implement with his students and UGM had the infrastructure to support it. The project involves students installing solar panels to villages and socialisation with the communities. [Discussion about the success of the project and support for remote communities.]	Returning to Indonesia; Family; Professional network; Post-scholarship career; Community service
[01:20:44]	Just solar technology, not hybrid because that's more expensive. The project was planning to provide electricity but after the people in the Gunung Kidul area said water was a higher priority than electricity the project adapted to focus on providing power to pump water which was easier to deliver. It's good learning for the students and some of them have gone on to join international projects. Many students are interested in the concept of sustainability but Agus is focused on training students in the technicalities of it.	Career
[01:23:58]	He was asked to bring the technology to Nusa Tenggara Barat and Timor Leste but feels he doesn't have the capacity yet. It's only been going three years at UGM. He feels it needs government backing. [Discussion about governmental approaches and the level of backing he needs to feel confident.]	Career; Professional network
[01:29:15]	India has a Ministry of Renewable Energy and in Indonesia, since 2010, there has been a section of the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources. It's moving in the right direction. He's becoming an expert outside the ministry	Career; Professional network

	and is consulted about energy policy. [Comments about implementing national policy at local level, wanting sustainable technology to be implemented and the new government's approach – nuclear or renewable.]	
[01:32:04]	Made friends with two other PhD students, Australians. The supervisor had them all over to his home. A Chinese friend made more friends by joining a Christian group but Agus, being Muslim, didn't have this opportunity. He got a part-time job at SEDO (Sustainable Energy Development Office) and met Australians there. He also joined Engineers Without Borders and met people at discussions there. His wife met people through school. He tried to mingle with Australians but felt it was difficult to have informal relationships, maybe because he had his family there. They lived in a low socio-economic area and he mostly felt safe but it wasn't easy to get to know the neighbours. They could have lived with other Indonesians but didn't because wanted to have an Aussie experience.	Living in Australia; Friendships; Work experience in Australia; Professional networks; Family; Socialising
[01:37:47]	His son went to primary school and sometimes he was invited to parties. They didn't invite other people, just joined in when invited. They had Malaysian friends they did things with. He had two Australian friends but they had their own lives and didn't have families yet. He keeps in touch now through Facebook. Feels there is a line between the public and personal or private with Australians and that was explained during pre-departure training. [Comments comparing Australia, Indonesia, Japan and Sweden.]	Living in Australia; Family; Connections with Australia
[01:43:22]	Hasn't been back to Australia. Could have gone on a short course but has been too busy at UGM, feels he can't be away for more than a month. He could take sabbatical but feels obliged to stay and give back for a while. He has been thinking about doing post-doctoral study somewhere, maybe the US or Germany. [Discussion about the Australia–Indonesia Centre (AIC) and how renewable energy projects might fit in.]	Connections with Australia; Career; Professional network
[01:48:09]	Agus wants to do major research with many stakeholders. Now he's Assistant Professor and he wants to be Assistant Professor in Renewable Energy Systems and Planning, to maintain his focus and expertise not lose it like many returning PhD graduates. It involves promoting his cause while continuing his work at a grass	Professional network; Career; Leadership

	roots level. [Further discussion about the AIC, ARG and Agus's desire to use his studies to really do something.]	
[01:53:44]	[Signing forms, organising to meet next interviewee and comments about difficulties contacting Australian alumni.]	
[01:57:06]	END	