
Livelihoods away from the land

Although agriculture is extremely important to Indonesia's people and economy, not everyone makes a living from the land. Eighty million people live in Indonesia's cities, almost 11 million of them in Jakarta alone. For urban residents, and those running small businesses in rural areas, access to land and natural resources is less important than earning a living wage in adequate working conditions, and being able to compete equally in the market. The economic crisis has increased the pressure on non-agricultural livelihoods, leaving many people more vulnerable to exploitation and insecurity.

Children at work

Surabaya is Indonesia's second city, and its industrial heartland, with many of the country's largest plastics, clothing, and cigarette factories, and one of its busiest ports. Young people come from surrounding villages and small towns to work in Surabaya in order to supplement their families' income. Many of them are girls. Faced with the choice of which children to take out of education and put to work, families more often decide to educate their sons. Employers prefer girls, as they are believed to be more diligent and easier to control than boys. The children live in crowded rented accommodation and often work up to 12 hours a day.

Throughout Indonesia, it is common for families to encourage their children to begin to work at an early age. Three-quarters of working children work as unpaid labourers in a family business while they learn how to run it in the future. It's part of the experience of growing up. Half of working children also attend school. Since the crisis of the late 1990s, however, economic necessity has driven children into formal employment. Research has indicated a sharp increase in the numbers of under-age children trying to get factory work. Employment in factories, often away from the family, has particular dangers for young workers, and is difficult to combine with education.

On paper, Indonesia provides good legislative protection for child labourers. No one under the age of 15 is allowed to work in a factory, and officially those between 15 and 18 may not work more than eight hours a day. In practice, however, these regulations are poorly enforced.

Reliable data on the number of children working in Indonesian factories are hard to obtain, but it is clear that children represent a significant part of the factory workforce.

Conditions in the factories are often very poor. Safety standards are low, and accidents are common. Many workers develop respiratory problems or hearing problems as a result of working in a dusty, poorly ventilated, or noisy environment without proper protection. In some factories, closed-circuit television cameras monitor the time that workers spend in the toilet. Although by law overtime is a voluntary undertaking, in practice it is often compulsory. Several child workers interviewed in recent research said they had suffered physical or verbal abuse, and nearly one-third of the girls interviewed reported being sexually abused at work. Although many of these conditions apply equally to adult workers, unhealthy or dangerous working conditions and long hours have a more harmful impact on young people.

A fair day's pay ...

Regulations on working conditions are even more difficult to enforce in smaller workshops. Dwi Jaya Abadi is a medium-sized leather-goods business in Tanggulangin, on the outskirts of Surabaya, producing and selling high-quality bags, wallets, and shoes for the domestic and overseas markets. Behind the smart, air-conditioned showroom is the workshop, where a staff of 60 or so men and women are at work. It is extremely hot and poorly ventilated. A group of women are assembling handbags, and the air is thick with fumes from the glue they are using. They work six days a week, with no sick pay or holiday pay. Women are paid less than men for the same tasks: *'Maybe men have a greater responsibility to support their families'*, says the manager. *'We don't think it's fair'*, say the women.

► Women making handbags in a leather-goods workshop on the outskirts of Surabaya. Smaller workshops such as this are often less well regulated than the large factories, and conditions for workers can be poor.



MARSINAH

Marsinah was a 25-year-old labour-rights activist who worked at a watch factory in East Java. She disappeared on 5 May 1993, the day after taking part in negotiations to end a dispute over the company's failure to comply with an order from the provincial Governor to raise workers' wages. Her mutilated body was discovered three days later, 200 kilometres from the factory. She had been raped and tortured.

The murder investigation progressed slowly, and the authorities seemed to be trying to understate both Marsinah's role in the strike, and the possible relationship between the strike action and the murder. Many labour-rights activists and human-rights groups suspected military involvement in Marsinah's murder, and were concerned about the lack of police impartiality. Managers from the factory were eventually tried and convicted of her murder, but there were widespread claims that confessions were extracted under torture. By 1995 the government could no longer defend the convictions, and all the defendants were released. To date, no new prosecution has been instigated. Marsinah has become a hero of the labour movement, but many other women are prevented or discouraged from playing an active role in labour organisations, either because of family commitments, or because unions tend to focus on issues of importance to men, rather than women.

Trade-union activity in Indonesia was severely limited under the New Order. A code of '*Pancasila* industrial relations' emphasised harmony between workers and management, and the prevention of conflict. Only one union was officially sanctioned, and industrial action was heavily restricted. Since the early 1990s, unofficial unions have begun to fight for workers' rights, especially for fair pay and decent, safe working conditions. However, continuing military and police involvement in labour disputes often results in intimidation and violence. One NGO activist working in this field comments that '*the language of human rights means little to the authorities*'.

▼ Surabaya's red-light district is said to be among the largest in South-East Asia. The brothels support a large community of small traders in an otherwise poor area.



Selling sex in Surabaya

It is around 6pm in Surabaya. The setting sun casts a fiery glow across the city. Rickshaws pedal back and forth in the streets, as office and factory workers head home from work. Food stalls do a brisk trade. But one corner of the city is just waking up – the working day is about to begin. Dolly, and the slightly more downmarket Jarak, are two parallel streets, linked by a maze of small alleys. This area of Surabaya is reportedly the most extensive red-light district in South-East Asia.

ANA'S STORY



Ana is 20 years old. She arrived in Dolly from her village in East Java just two weeks ago. Brokers came to her village and asked if anyone wanted to work in Surabaya. She came here with another girl, thinking that they would be found domestic work or jobs in a beauty parlour or hairdressing salon. Instead they entered a brothel. They can earn around Rp100,000 (about £7.50) for each client. The 14 girls in her house start work around 7pm, sitting on a raised sofa in a front room with a large window, so prospective clients can see them all. They usually finish around 3am. It's really boring,

she says, waiting like that, and it's hard to stay awake, but the TV is on, and loud music is blaring out. An older woman and her husband run the house, looking after the girls and cooking for them, and there are several other men in the house, who guard the girls from unpleasant clients.

The girls have an account with the brothel and can often run up big debts – indeed, debts are encouraged – so that the girls have to stay and work them off. As well as drinks and snacks, it is tempting to buy new clothes and electronic equipment. Ana hasn't yet been paid anything, but in a couple of months she will be able to go home for a visit, and she should be able to send money home. Her little room is covered in the usual posters of pop stars, and she is proud of a new hairband that she has just bought. A friend pops in with a blouse to lend her. Ana was bored in junior high school and didn't want to continue to senior high school. Her village, she says, is pretty quiet – but she's counting the days until she can visit home.

▲ Ana and her friend relax and enjoy the early-evening scene from the roof of the brothel where they work in Surabaya.

Lilie Sulistyowati is the director of Abdi Asih, a local NGO which works with marginalised women and children, especially sex workers. She explains that prostitution should not be seen as a special case. *'The reason why young women arrive from the villages to work in brothels is the same as the reason why they turn up in factories and workshops. They are seeking a better life for themselves and their families.'*

Nevertheless, women working in Surabaya's brothels are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and health risks. A mobile clinic visits the area every week, providing antibiotic injections and other treatment. The use of condoms is not widespread, despite Abdi Asih's health-education work, which also teaches sex workers about the dangers of over-using antibiotics and raises awareness of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. Although rates of infection are not yet very high – only five confirmed cases of HIV/AIDS have so far been reported – the profits are high enough here to encourage women to continue to work after they have been infected.

The small alleyways between the main streets of Dolly and Jarak have a very mixed population. There are private houses, small shops, beauty parlours, hairdressers, food stalls, and even a mosque. There is a close relationship between the brothels and the rest of the community:

the sex workers need the services and facilities in the neighbourhood, and local traders benefit from the wealthier people whom the brothels attract into an otherwise poor neighbourhood. The area is a rich source of bribes for the city authorities, as brothel owners must make regular payments to avoid raids. There is also a local community security force, paid for by monthly contributions from the brothels. When Abdi Asih began running classes in cooking, hairdressing, and sewing, to provide women with skills for earning a living outside prostitution, it met with considerable opposition from community officials. Local inhabitants were worried that, if the sex workers left, their departure would affect the fortunes of the whole community.

▼ These women work from home, carving wooden figures for Ibu Nyoman to sell through her showroom in Tegallalang, Bali. They are paid a daily piece-rate.



Rural business

Outside the large cities, many small traders run family businesses, ranging from make-shift kiosks selling daily necessities to specialist businesses producing for an overseas market. Nyoman Rusi has been dealing in wooden handcrafts in the Balinese village of Tegallalang, near the tourist centre of Ubud, for the last eight years. Her shop acts mainly as a showroom and warehouse, from which she supplies bulk orders of carved animal figures and furniture to buyers from across the world. One buyer comes from the Czech Republic every three months. Her stock is produced by local craftsmen who work at home for daily piece-rates. The carvings are then finished at the shop: sanded, painted, and varnished by hand. 'Most popular at the moment are giraffes, snakes and turtles – the more traditional masks and statues seem to have gone out of fashion', Ibu Nyoman laughs. 'But the Balinese are very clever with their hands, and will make anything for you if you come with an idea or a picture.' The profit margin on these bulk purchases

is not great, unlike the large mark-ups charged in the tourist shops in Ubud, but there is the added security of regular orders. Over her years of trading, she has seen the community grow from only four or five shops to a whole street, and competition is increasingly fierce.

Although Ibu Nyoman's goods are destined for retail abroad, she herself does not export anything directly. Her business relies on what visiting customers are willing to pay. One is a Canadian who lives in Bali and sells products overseas via the Internet. There is a danger that small traders like Ibu Nyoman will lose out to those with better access to new technology, which could connect them to a wider market. The Indonesian government recently announced plans to help farmers to gain access to global markets and pricing information through the Internet, but it admitted that this would not be feasible for smaller individual operators. The same could also be true for small traders in other sectors.

Ibu Wayan works as a labourer in a limestone quarry in Bali. Her job is to collect rocks as they are loosened by the excavators and load them on to waiting trucks. In Bali it is common to see women working as building labourers and in quarries, carrying stones balanced on their heads. It is extremely hot, there is no shade, and the nearest hospital is several miles away. The quarry is worked by a concession, and the company pays piece-rates. Ibu Wayan used to work in a Chinese restaurant, but '*I got bored, and wanted a change*'. Other workers had less choice. One man used to work in a bank in the exclusive tourist resort of Nusa Dua. He lost his job during the monetary crisis. He moved to work in a hotel, but when it eventually went bankrupt, he came to the quarry. Many people labouring in the quarry used to have office jobs, he says.



► This limestone quarry in Bali, where men and women work collecting rocks for the building trade, is only a few kilometres from the exclusive tourist resort of Nusa Dua.

Indonesia in conflict: the end of the nation?

Since 1998 the cracks in the unified veneer of the Indonesian State have begun to show in particularly ugly ways. Compounded by economic hardship and increasingly intense competition for resources, tensions which had lain dormant for decades, suppressed by the New Order regime, began to come to the surface, provoking inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflict in several areas. Anxious to protect their communities against exploitation or marginalisation, and seeing no other way to make their voices heard, increasing numbers of people have begun to identify with separatist or ethnic movements. Too often, conflict has found expression in violence.

▼ *Police on an operation in Surabaya. In some areas, a loss of faith in the official system is leading communities to organise their own 'security' forces to protect citizens and administer justice.*



Since independence, civilians have consistently been the main casualties, even the targets, of conflict. Violence against civilians has been used by the armed forces to contain and discourage separatist movements, and to maintain control over the population as a whole, while rebel groups too have used violence to intimidate local communities. Violence against women, including rape and sexual slavery, has been employed as a weapon of war, especially in East Timor and Aceh.

There has been a growing militarisation of Indonesian society, with the establishment of civil militias, ostensibly to prevent mob violence during the 1999 elections. In parts of Java and Bali, vigilante forces have begun administering rough justice to transgressors, such is the loss of faith in the police and legal system. Arming civilians has become a new medium for State violence, with the military suspected of mobilising, arming, and supporting militia groups in East Timor, Maluku, and West Papua.

In some areas, perceived threats to power and livelihoods have resulted in attempts to drive out settlers in the name of ethnic empowerment. In West Kalimantan in 1997 and 1999, and Central Kalimantan in 2001, transmigrants and spontaneous settlers from the island of Madura, who had lived in the region for many years, were the victims of violent attacks by indigenous Dayak people. Many Madurese were forced to leave the region.

Independence for West Papua?

In several regions, tension has manifested itself in demands for secession from the republic, often with some historical justification. West Papua (formerly Irian Jaya) was given to Indonesia by the UN in 1963, after the Dutch had surrendered their claim to the territory, on the condition that a plebiscite would be held within six years for the Papuan people to choose independence or union with Indonesia. Instead of allowing every citizen to vote, the Indonesian authorities appointed 1000 delegates to an electoral college; the resulting 'Act of Free Choice', held in 1969, was, according to the Indonesians, a clear vote in favour of union. Critics say the government fixed the result by bribing and intimidating the delegates. Since then, a guerrilla force, OPM (*Operasi Papua Merdeka* – Free Papua Movement) has conducted a separatist struggle, largely ignored by the outside world. As a result of the conflict, large numbers of Papuans have been killed, detained without trial, or forced to leave their homes. Those who remain face continuing insecurity and the fear of persecution.

West Papua is a poor and underdeveloped province, despite its exceptional wealth of natural resources. It is the home of Freeport Indonesia, one of the world's richest mines, exploiting enormous reserves of copper and gold. Yet indigenous Papuans have the lowest life expectancy and highest maternal mortality rates in Indonesia. They are dismissed as 'primitive' by the government; swamped by transmigrants, who now form

90 per cent of the urban population of West Papua; and controlled by non-Papuan officials. With very little opportunity to defend their interests through participation in the political process, Papuans see independence as their only chance to take control of their own future.

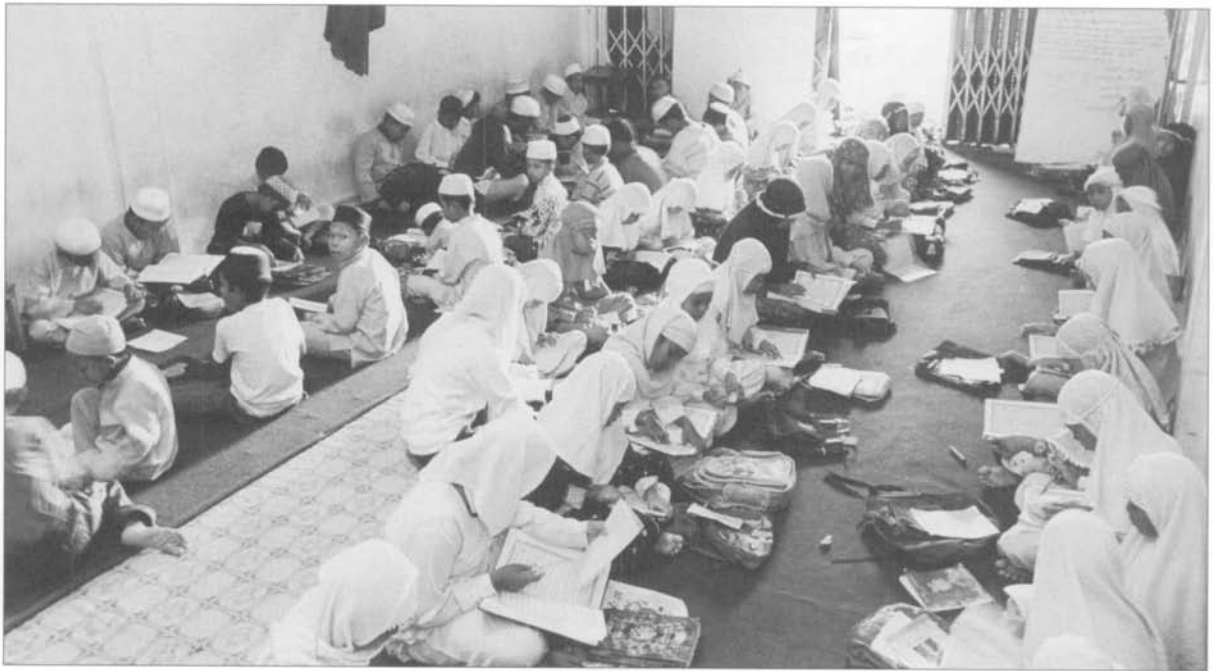
Aceh: the struggle goes on

The designation of Aceh as an area of military operation (*Daerah Operasi Militer* – DOM) ended in 1998, but this has not reduced levels of violence there. In fact, the separatist movement, GAM, has intensified its operations. Under President Habibie a large-scale withdrawal of troops began, and he even apologised for the brutality of the military during DOM. Anger at the excesses of DOM has, however, consolidated support for the rebels. A peaceful student-led movement calling for a referendum on independence gathered momentum for a while. The government now proposes that the province should keep 80 per cent of the locally generated revenue, but critics suspect that these concessions are a deliberate attempt to deflect calls for genuine self-determination.

The conflict in Aceh is said to have claimed around 30,000 lives since 1988. Recent attempts by international mediators to bring the two sides together for talks have had limited success. The fact that the Indonesian government is participating at all suggests that it now recognises GAM as a real political force, rather than regarding it as a mere criminal element. However, the negotiations have not reduced armed conflict on the ground, and this is a war in which most of the victims continue to be civilians. Both sides have an interest in prolonging the conflict, not only as a means of maintaining their legitimacy, but also as a way of safeguarding their income. Meanwhile, a climate of fear continues to pervade the area, as people struggle to maintain their livelihoods despite threats of violence, coercion, and deprivation. Food shortages are a constant risk in an area where it can be dangerous for farmers to tend their fields, for fear of attack or abduction. Possibly even more damaging, however, is the atmosphere of suspicion and lack of trust within communities torn apart by years of violence.

Neighbours at war: the conflict in Maluku

Violence between Christian and Muslim communities in Maluku broke out in January 1999; by mid-2002 it had claimed at least 7000 lives. Sparked by a trivial argument over a bus fare on Ambon, the violence spread to many areas in central and north Maluku. Hundreds of thousands of people have been forced to leave their homes as a result of the conflict; thousands of houses and other buildings have been destroyed, and the local economy is in ruins. Although a peace agreement was signed in February 2002, not all parties were satisfied by its terms. At the time of writing, lasting peace was still more an aspiration than a reality.



▲ A Koran class for Muslim children in a makeshift schoolroom in Ambon city. Children throughout Maluku now study in segregated schools.

Many people were surprised that conflict broke out here at all. With roughly equal numbers of Muslims and Christians, Maluku had been seen as a model of inter-religious harmony. However, in recent years, transmigration and spontaneous migration had tipped the demographic balance slightly in favour of the Muslims. In a region largely neglected by the private sector, the government and the official bureaucracy are the major employers and almost the sole sources of influence and access to resources. As their population grew, the Muslims became increasingly aware that they were under-represented in government and civil-service positions. A policy designed to rectify this caused resentment in the Christian community. The increasing difficulty of making a living, as a result of the economic crisis, led each side to encroach on the other's traditional areas of economic activity. Adding to the tension, both Christians and indigenous Muslims were becoming resentful of migrants, whom they accused of taking their jobs and opportunities.

As the grip of authoritarian rule from Jakarta relaxed, there was an increased opportunity to vent these frustrations physically. Access to small arms, once very difficult for civilians in Indonesia, has become much easier in recent years. The weapons used by both sides soon shifted from homemade Molotov cocktails and knives to standard-issue guns and grenades. Children have been directly involved in the fighting, employed as arsonists because they are small and fast. Since the violence began, a 'cleansing' process has resulted in religious exclusion in most areas. Children attend segregated schools and have very little chance to mix with children from the other side. Many people fear that this is storing up trouble for the future.

Outside influence

The easy availability of arms is an indication of the involvement of other parties in this conflict. Many external provocateurs have been suggested, including the military, politicians, and religious groups. In April 2000, Laskar Jihad, a militant Islamic force organised and trained in central Java, arrived in Maluku, ostensibly to provide humanitarian assistance to victims of the conflict. Laskar Jihad troops have remained in the region and are widely reported to have contributed to the continuing violence. On the Christian side, the radical separatist group FKM maintains a provocative stance.

The other principal actor in the conflict has been the armed forces. A state of civil emergency was declared in Maluku in June 2000. The vacuum of authority left by an inept provincial administration was filled by the military, which has signally failed to contain the violence. It has been suggested that certain senior military figures might have an interest in prolonging unrest in areas like Maluku, in order to safeguard the military's position in relation to the government. Certainly, individual soldiers have been charged with provoking, supporting, and even actively participating in violent incidents in Maluku.

Local peace-building

Whoever is provoking and prolonging the conflict, the population in Maluku has had enough and is looking for a way out. The new political climate in Indonesia may not have achieved much in the fight against corruption and human-rights abuses, but at least now these are topics for open debate. With the relaxation of media censorship, people are better informed than ever before about violent events in politically charged contexts.

Nevertheless, the systematic disempowerment of local-level institutions during the Suharto era has left local communities ill-equipped to contribute to peace-building initiatives. Most efforts tend to address the superficial symptoms of conflict – violence, displacement, failure of essential

services – rather than the underlying causes, such as abuse of military and police power, and the lack of strong civilian leadership. In Maluku, while some local conflict-resolution activities have been successful in rural areas, many have struggled with the complexity of conflict in a crowded urban context, and have found it difficult to re-establish trust in a community racked by fear and suspicion.

▼ *Caught in a fragment of a mirror: the image of a displaced person, living with his family in a cramped room in a settlement in Ambon*





WORKING TOGETHER IN A DIVIDED CITY

Every afternoon at five o'clock in an Ambon hotel, a team of volunteers meets to discuss its work. The team was established by Baileo, an Ambonese NGO, within a week of the first outbreak of violence in January 1999, to help those affected by the conflict. It began with just seven members, both Muslims and Christians. As the conflict spread, and more and more people were displaced, the team grew; there are now around 50 volunteers.

Linda Holle, a university economics student, chairs the meeting. There is a friendly, relaxed atmosphere, but the team is serious about its work. The volunteers have been involved in many aspects of the emergency relief programme in Ambon, including health care, water and sanitation, and information and documentation. They have also contributed to a campaign to end violence against women and children, and have played a role in some of the peace-building initiatives. Today the volunteers are discussing the results of a pilot questionnaire survey to assess the psycho-social impact of the conflict on displaced populations. There is plenty of enthusiasm, but also occasional hints of the pressure of living and working in a divided city, with constant fears about security. 'We're bored with living like this', says Linda, her smile fading for a moment.

The volunteers have learned a lot about the anger and fear that rule people's lives in Maluku today. 'The most valuable lesson I have learned from the activities of the volunteer team is to be able to understand the attitude of someone who occasionally gets swept along by their emotions', says Kace, one of the volunteers. 'But for me this is a spur to continue working without reward to help people who are suffering.'

The Ambon volunteers are ordinary people, coming together at the local level to make a practical difference under difficult circumstances. At the same time, the team provides a rare opportunity for young people from the two communities to meet, exchange ideas, and work together for a brighter future.

As the military – taking its orders from central government – is effectively in charge in areas of unrest such as Maluku, Aceh, and West Papua, the notion of regional autonomy becomes practically meaningless. Ironically, those regions that most need an element of self-determination and control over their resources are precisely those that are least likely to benefit from the recent legislation.

Caught between two worlds: Indonesia's internally displaced

Between 1999 and 2001 more than one million people were forced to leave their homes as a result of conflict in Aceh, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Maluku, and East Timor. Of these, around three-quarters – 800,000 people – have remained displaced for more than one year, with no clear prospect of either going home or being permanently resettled elsewhere. Leo Desariah is one of them. He and his family fled from Ambon soon after the violence broke out there in 1999. They arrived in Baubau, on Buton island, with only the clothes that they were wearing. This is the second time Leo has experienced terrible violence. He remembers as a small boy being saved from a bloodbath by his grandfather, during a pro-independence uprising in 1950 in South Maluku.

Although both Leo and his parents were born on Ambon, they are descended from Butonese immigrants. They see themselves as distinct from the Ambonese, and tried to stay neutral during the conflict, although migrant communities were the target of much resentment. On the other hand, they have 'returned' to Buton, along with many other ethnic Butonese, but are finding it difficult to identify with the local population: they speak Ambonese Malay, not the local language, and some don't even

know which villages their ancestors came from.

With no family connections, many people had no choice but to settle in government camps.

Leo is the leader of Wakonti camp, just outside Baubau. It has been home to 250 families for the last three years. The camp was hurriedly established by the government when the first internally displaced people (IDPs) began to arrive. It's rather crowded, but people have constructed houses for themselves, and the streets are neat and tidy. Relations with the local community are not good: permanent residents have accused the IDPs of cutting down trees from the watershed behind the camp. Leo admits that some people may have planted crops there when they first arrived – *'It was an emergency, after all'*. Now the IDPs claim that they don't even use wood for cooking, while locals cut trees to make houses. Despite these problems, no one in Wakonti has any plans to

▼ Leo Desariah, leader of Wakonti camp, Buton





▲ A street in Wakonti camp, Buton. Conditions for displaced people vary: in this camp, residents are fairly well-off materially, but uncertain about their future.

return to live in Ambon in the near future. ‘*Why would we want to?*’, asks Leo. ‘*We don’t want to be a minority group again.*’ Although people do go back periodically to check on their property and family, the memories of the violence are still fresh.

An uncertain future

The alternative, however, is far from clear. When the displaced people arrived, the government agreed to allow them to use the land on which they settled for five years. Now there are only two years left, and no one knows what will happen after that. Leo explains that the IDPs are very willing to make their own efforts, as long as they have support from the government in such matters as the provision of water supplies – and electricity, so that children can do their homework at night. ‘*We are not poor, but not well-off either*’, he says.

Leo’s story is not unusual. For many IDPs in Indonesia, escaping from conflict is just the beginning of years of hardship and uncertainty. The government, insisting that providing assistance encourages IDPs to remain displaced, has introduced a policy of eradicating the problem of IDPs altogether, either through resettlement or through return. In many areas the quality of humanitarian assistance falls below international standards, and IDPs are not given the information that they need to help them to decide whether to return home or be resettled elsewhere. There are fears that resettlement of large numbers of IDPs in a revival of the transmigration programme could contribute to further tension and unrest in the future. Homeless and vulnerable, displaced people risk becoming a new marginal class within Indonesian society.

Will Indonesia fall apart?

Some people see the increase in conflict as an indication that Indonesia's days as a unitary nation-state are numbered. But rumours of its imminent disintegration have proved premature in the past. The crises of 1998 resulted in renewed enthusiasm for party politics and a high electoral turnout, rather than catastrophic violence and rupture. Even if the current unrest in certain areas does not presage a descent into generalised civil war, Indonesia can expect to experience conflict into the foreseeable future. While the triangle of mutual benefit between the bureaucracy, the private sector, and the military continues to function, there is every chance that local populations will continue to find their interests overlooked. As long as the army has an interest in proving its indispensability to the civilian administration in Jakarta, there will be no concerted effort to resolve conflict and bring offenders to justice.

The international community, including the World Bank and foreign governments, has for decades clung to a 'modernisation' model of development. It turned a blind eye to abuses of human rights in Indonesia, insisting that stability and economic growth would produce an active middle class which would defend human rights and bring about a more democratic society. As an Asian tiger economy, Indonesia was seen as a model case – not to mention a major customer of Western arms manufacturers. Despite the failure of modernisation to encourage a more liberal political climate and benefit the general population, these basic assumptions have not essentially changed. Now, the fact that Indonesia is in a 'transitional' state is seen as a reason for not challenging the government on its record of State-sponsored human-rights abuses, for fear that this may impede economic recovery.

None of this suggests that there will be much external pressure on the Indonesian authorities to control abuses of power and resolve conflict swiftly and peacefully; nor that the impetus for change is likely to arise from within. Meanwhile, Indonesians will need to come to terms with a much more fragmented idea of State and nationhood.

The future of Indonesian democracy

Reform of the political system is just the first step towards a functioning democracy. The next is to nurture a healthy civil society, where a variety of social and political organisations actively promote the interests of ordinary people and hold the government to account. The Suharto regime worked hard to dismantle social institutions and discourage non-State associations of any kind. It was virtually impossible for non-government organisations (NGOs) to criticise the government in any way. Since 1998 hundreds of new NGOs have collaborated with trade unions, women's organisations, and traditional social organisations to work towards a brighter future for all Indonesians.

Traditional social organisations

▼ A women's credit group, Sumba. A local NGO provides funding, advice, and training.

Although modern-style NGOs were heavily restricted under the New Order, many traditional methods of community support were permitted to continue. One example is *arisan*: informal savings and credit clubs operating in

many Indonesian communities, where members – often women – meet regularly and make contributions to the fund, which is 'won' by each member in turn. The *arisan* is a useful way for people who find it hard to borrow from a bank to obtain small amounts of capital with which to buy school uniforms, for example, or start a small business. Many labour-intensive tasks in the village, such as



harvesting, or building a new mosque or church, are completed through a principle of *gotong royong*, or 'helping each other': everyone helps in some way, contributing labour or preparing refreshments for the workers. *Gotong royong* meant that people who were left unemployed by the economic crisis could rely on their family and community to provide support and help them to get back on their feet.

EDUCATING GIRLS IN MADURA

Ibu Djum'atul Cholisah is a member of Fatayat, the young women's branch of NU, an Islamic organisation in Bangkalan, Madura, which is working to improve education in western Madura. Many parents there prefer to give their children a faith-based education, rather than sending them to government-run schools. Most education beyond elementary level is provided by *pesantren*: private Islamic boarding schools run by Muslim clerics. There are 40,000 such schools in Indonesia, educating millions of children.



Fatayat's work is especially important for girls, in an area where many marry before they are fifteen years old. Often, families cannot afford to educate all their children, and boys are nearly always given priority. As a result, many women in Madura cannot read and write Indonesian, although they may know Arabic through religious teaching. They lack confidence in themselves, and see few alternatives to early marriage and raising a family.

Fatayat staff support local *madrasah* (Islamic schools), and conduct training sessions to help

local teachers to improve their skills. One such school is Yayasan Pendidikan Islam Al-Ismailiyah, a *madrasah* run by *Nahdlatul Ulama* in the village of Dabung which provides mixed elementary education as well as religious instruction. There are around 200 pupils, with roughly equal numbers of girls and boys. Fees range between Rp1000 and Rp2500 a month, although the children from the poorest families pay nothing. In the afternoons, children who attend government primary schools join the *madrasah* pupils for religious instruction. The school is slowly being rebuilt with permanent materials, and Fatayat has provided a range of books for pupils to borrow and read when they like.

Although NU at the national level is perceived to be relatively conservative, here its grassroots activities are progressive and practical. Ibu Cholisah explains that one of the best ways to reach women is not through formal education, but through teaching practical life skills such as nutrition, child care, and small-business management. Fatayat recommends women to finish their education before marriage: 'Be clever before being married'. Many Fatayat members are teachers themselves. 'It's really important to be able to provide women with role models and alternative examples', says Ibu Cholisah. She laughs: 'Not me though, I'm just a housewife!'

The largest non-government organisations under the New Order were religious ones. Mass Muslim organisations like the urban *Muhammadiyah* and the rural-based *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU), which has a membership of at least 35 million, spread across Java, Sumatra, Sulawesi, and Kalimantan, were established in the early twentieth century and drew on the traditional authority of local religious leaders. Despite periods of acting as overtly political institutions, these organisations, with a wide network of local branches, devote themselves primarily to providing education and social services at the grassroots level.

An explosion of activism

Since 1998, restrictions on rights to association have been lifted. Civil society has been quick to respond to the changed political atmosphere, playing an important role in developing proposals for political and social reform. There has been an explosion in the numbers of NGOs registered in Indonesia. A whole range of people are becoming involved for the first time in organisations which aim to fight corruption, alleviate poverty, end environmental destruction, and promote human rights. *'Everyone is setting up an NGO'*, says one long-term activist, smiling.

This extraordinary blossoming of civil society does have its problems. Many of the new organisations have been established specifically to attract some of the international funding now flooding the country. They do not necessarily have strong community support, or a long-term strategy for sustainable change. There is also a danger of Indonesia's non-government sector becoming heavily dependent on foreign funding, which may make it difficult for NGOs to plan for the future with confidence.

One Indonesian organisation which has worked hard to avoid over-dependence on external funders is the Centre for Environmental Education (*Pusat Pendidikan Lingkungan Hidup* – PPLH) near Surabaya, in East Java. Twelve thousand people pass through the gates of this research and education centre every year. Local schoolchildren are free to use the library, and the centre runs courses for local farmers, companies, and government officials. *'A group from a hotel in Surabaya*

is here at the moment, on a team-building weekend which will also encourage the participants to think about how environmental issues relate to their work', says Suroso, the Director. Aside from running courses, the centre also provides accommodation for tourists and travellers, and runs an organic restaurant. In this way PPLH funds 80 per cent of its own educational and environmental work. *'It's not easy to remain independent,'* says Suroso, *'but we think it's very important to do so'.*



▲ Asmara Nababan, Secretary General of Komisi Nasional Hak Asasi Manusia – the national, independent Commission for Human Rights – on a visit to Ambon

Housewives with a difference

Suara Ibu Peduli – The Voice of Concerned Mothers – was established in Jakarta at the height of the economic crisis in February 1998, by a group of middle-class housewives protesting at the rising price of milk in the city. Before long, SIP was providing meals for the thousands of student demonstrators whose week-long occupation of the parliament building was a crucial event in the campaign to topple President Suharto. Nowadays, SIP's activities aim to support those who are struggling with the challenges of daily life. SIP provides health and education services, and hopes to improve child nutrition and support micro-credit programmes.

Like many women's organisations in Indonesia, SIP demonstrates women's desire to redefine their role in society. Javanese tradition, in particular, requires women to be obedient wives and mothers, whose main concern is the home. Women were often affected most severely by the economic crisis, a fact which has prompted women from all backgrounds to become more politically aware, and more active in working to overcome the social problems affecting them and their families.

No going back?

Political and economic events in Indonesia since 1998 have changed the country for ever. While it has not been an easy time for Indonesians, most people have survived the turmoil, and many still have high hopes for the future. Public tolerance of government abuses is far lower than at any time during the New Order, and new legislation has made a start on reforming a corrupt and authoritarian system.



► Since 1998, street protests and demonstrations have become far more common, as the public becomes less tolerant of abuses of power.

ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS THROUGH THE RADIO: SWARA ALAM 100.55 FM

Swara Alam (the Voice of Nature) is a radio station with a difference. Based in Kendari, in South-East Sulawesi, it was set up as a way to communicate information about local environmental issues to the public. It was started in 2000 with a budget of less than Rp2 million (about £150). In the early days, the station didn't have a proper studio – just a microphone in an office, which looked out on a chicken coop. People used to say that the breakfast show was more accurately *Swara Ayam* (the Voice of Chickens) than *Swara Alam*!



Nowadays things are far more professional. Broadcasting for 15 hours a day to Kendari and the surrounding area, the station employs five journalists and has a computer-based broadcasting system, with satellite feeds from a network of news services. *Swara Alam*'s director is Hasrul Kokoh. He explains that the programme includes plenty of popular music, mixed with the environmental and news features, to catch people's attention and

keep them listening. The idea is to reach people who would not normally think about environmental issues – for example, the controversial logging operation in the hills behind Kendari, which is contributing to erosion and increased sedimentation in the bay. *Swara Alam* is always looking for new ways of communicating its message. It even held a competition to find the best new song about the environment, and the winning entry is played regularly on the network. It broadcasts interactive discussion programmes, with government officials and leading environmentalists invited to take part, and the station is increasingly experimenting with mobile-phone text messages as a cheap way for people to participate and share their opinions.

Although many of the features have an environmental focus, the station also acts as a valuable resource for gathering and broadcasting community news and strengthening local culture. Through association with a national network of like-minded stations, *Swara Alam* is also able to broadcast features of more general interest on issues such as human rights, or local autonomy.

Hasrul Kokoh takes a very practical approach. He says they chose radio as a medium for spreading awareness of environmental issues because it is more lively than print, and a cheap way to reach a large number of people. *'The great advantage of radio is that you can listen while you are doing something else. Housewives tell us they tune in while cooking or looking after the children. You can't read a newsletter at the same time as doing household chores.'*

But if Indonesia has learned one lesson from this period, it is that democracy concerns more than mere legislation. In a country where a whole generation has been denied participation in government and decision making, the transformation into a truly democratic society will take at least another generation. This fledgling democracy is now at its most fragile. The implementation of reformist policies depends on the support of the civil service, the military, and the judiciary, which is by no means guaranteed. Continuing conflict – with the greater role for the military that it entails – and the slow pace of economic recovery also threaten to undermine the political advances made so far.

Perhaps most importantly, taking control of the future must be seen as everybody's business, and everybody's responsibility, not just the preserve of the middle- and upper-class elite. After thirty years of repression, ordinary people need to draw on both traditional and modern methods of community organisation to create grassroots organisations ready to defend people's right to a secure future. Without this, change at the top will mean little, and conditions could very easily change back.

▼ *The future of Indonesia rests as much in the hands of ordinary people as it does in those of the politicians and policy makers.*

