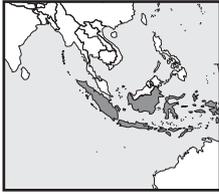


INDONESIA

Longing for a peaceful country



The Government has failed to provide a satisfactory level of basic human and social rights. Poverty has become fertile ground for violence, and the State is not ensuring respect for religious, cultural and sexual minorities. Opportunistic extremist groups and politicians are attempting to profit from widespread hardship by provoking more extreme forms of intolerance. Civil society groups are responding by reaching out to Government bodies and the broader public, advocating a revival of pluralism.

PEKKA (Women Headed Household Empowerment)
Nani Zulminarni¹

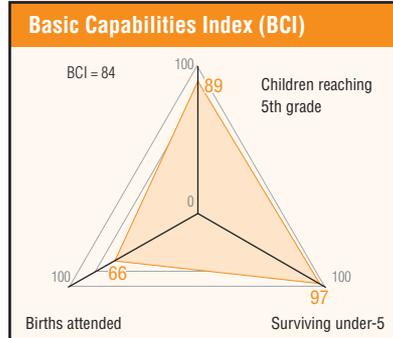
Demonstrations by students and a wide range of other activist groups against official policies have become a common sight in practically every major city. Core demands are for Government action to break the rising cost of living and end pervasive corruption. The authorities often respond with beatings, shootings and incarceration, however throwing protestors in jail cannot hide the reality that poverty is growing. In 2008 alone, the number of people living below the poverty line (an income below USD 1 per day) will jump to 41.7 million, 22% of the total population, estimates the Indonesian Institute of Sciences. If the threshold were USD 2 a day, the percentage would nearly double.

Oil, inflation and poverty

Since mid-2007, millions of people in nearly every part of the archipelago have been lining up to get some of the most basic products they need to survive, including cheap rice and cooking oil, as well as fuel. The price of refined fuel oil has leaped more than 175% since 2005, accelerating overall inflation to 12% by mid-2008, according to Bank Indonesia estimates. Purchasing power has not kept pace.

The Government has responded to the rising cost of oil by hiking the price of refined fuel. Oil production has been dwindling since 2000; the flow has already shifted from export to import. To reduce its budget deficits, the Government has slashed fuel subsidies, launched a program to convert refined fuel oil into gas to satisfy household needs, and cut social expenditures for education and health. These initiatives have been body blows to the poor, provoking widespread anger against the Government. A growing number of Indonesians are becoming frustrated that more than 30% of the budget goes to pay off State debt to international financial institutions and other lenders.

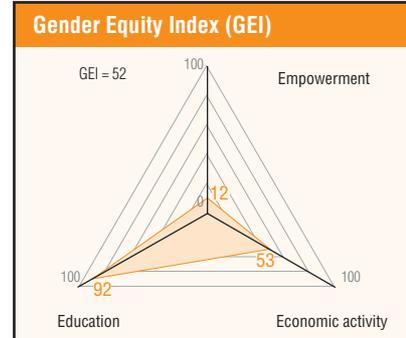
The Government solution has been to privatize basic services. As a result, the quality of education and health services has deteriorated in poor com-



munities, widening the gap between them and the rich. To overcome these problems, the Government has announced a National Community Development Initiative (NCDI) with a diverse mandate, including direct cash assistance for poor communities, loans for small and medium businesses, and a community development program. However, many critics are sceptical, believing that the social support system is so under-funded, chaotic, corrupt, and plagued by inaccurate data retrieval that the NCDI cannot possibly be effective.

Activists and the budget

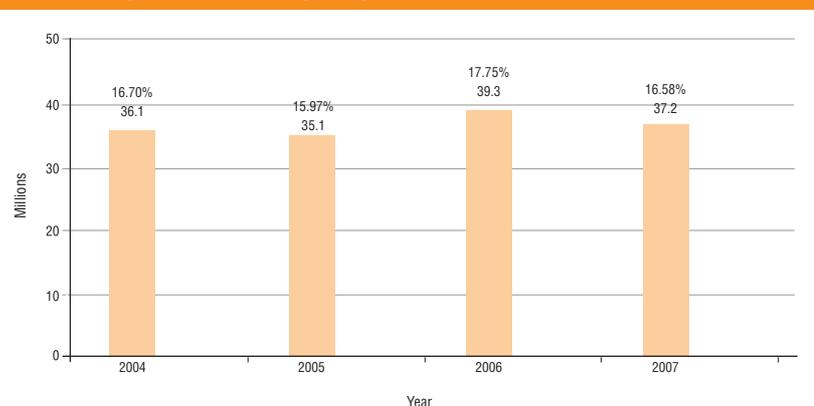
NGO groups have been vigorously demanding changes in the budget. Civil community groups are calling for more funding for community social serv-



ices; women's groups are insisting that money has to be provided to secure fundamental gender rights in areas such as health, particularly to reduce the appalling level of maternal mortality during childbirth (310 mothers per 100,000 births).

Women are also urging action to stem rising domestic violence, including abuse, part of a surge in violence of all kinds as poverty shreds the social fabric. Reported acts of violence against women have been spurring between 9% and 30% annually, according to The National Commission on Stopping Violence against Women (Komnas Perempuan). Although some of this increase may reflect greater willingness to go to the authorities, it may also indicate that incidents of violence are exploding at a terrifying pace.

CHART 1. Population under the poverty line



Source: BPS

¹ National Coordinator of PEKKA (Women Headed Household Empowerment) and Chairperson of Advisory board of PPSW (The Center for Women Resources Development).

Poverty and gendered-based violence

Domestic violence, particularly assaults on wives by the husband or children by their parents, often erupts in times of growing economic stress. Adults, particularly men, who lose hope and are overwhelmed by feelings of powerlessness, are much more likely to lash out against weak or vulnerable family members. At a time when the combined unemployment and underemployment rates have climbed above 39%, many more families are on the edge.

The efforts of women's organizations to persuade government agencies to take action have been somewhat effective. In its most recent report, Komnas Perempuan counted up the number of official measures taken over the past decade and cited 11 at the national level, 15 at the district level, and 3 at the regional level. Unfortunately, enforcement of these laws remains weak. In addition, the country's decentralized system of government has opened the way to official discrimination against women. For example, 27 districts have laws requiring that women dress "properly", in effect authorizing the State to control the female body.

Failure to guarantee a plural society

Basic laws guarantee freedom and protection for all Indonesians, and the Government has ratified nearly all international agreements that commit states to protecting human rights. Implementation, however, is another story. Weak law enforcement and an immature political system have fragmented Indonesian society. Tension is growing in areas such as religion. Violent acts by the Jemaah Ahmadiyah Indonesia (JAI) sect over the last three years are indicative of the Government's failure to provide adequate safety and protection to minority groups. The Government has responded by banning the JAI. This measure violates its commitment to freedom of belief while angering sympathetic groups that may react by assaulting communities considered *different*.

Over the last five years, the number of extremist groups that attempt to impose their beliefs on others by force has grown. Human rights activists are beginning to worry that the Government may eventually pander to them, and marginal groups such as sexual minorities will suffer the same fate as the JAI.

A fertile ground for violence

The widening gap between rich and poor creates a dangerous opening for extremist groups and politicians. If current trends continue, the poor, minority communities and society in general may pay a heavy price. Human rights groups and community organizations, including NGO's, are responding with efforts to revitalize Indonesian support for pluralism and respect for basic human rights. Their activities include public education programs and campaigns to convince the Government that it must find ways to overcome the many challenges the State and country are confronting. ■

CHART 2. Yearly inflation rate

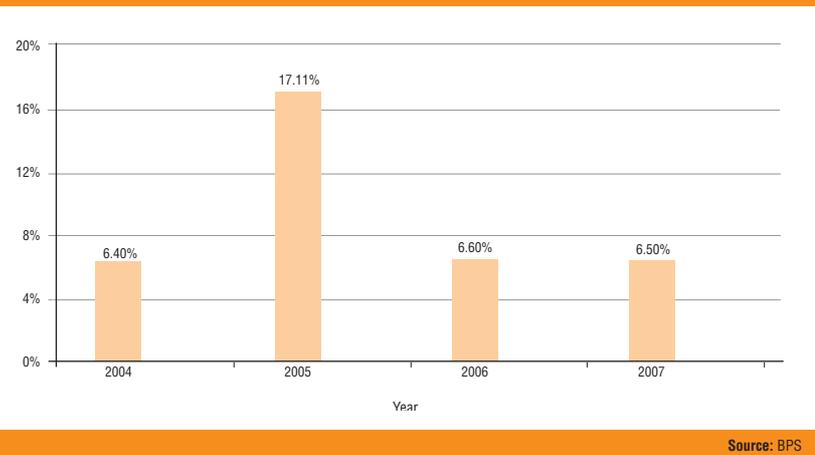


CHART 3. Reported domestic violence cases

