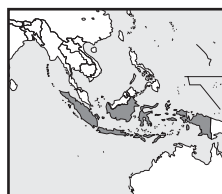


■ INDONESIA

Combatting poverty without a gender perspective



Poverty reduction programmes should take into account regional disparities and include gender-sensitive methodologies and strategies as well as allow for the participation and input of women's civil organizations. In addition, the Government should establish specific measures to meet the Millennium Development Goals and implement mechanisms to reduce corruption and bureaucracy.

Women Headed Household Empowerment Programme (PEKKA)

Nani Zulminarni¹

A gloomy portrait²

Indonesia's population in 2004 is estimated at around 210 million, half of whom are women. An estimated 55.6% live in rural areas and 65.6% are in the productive age category (15–64 years old). Official data reveal that the average income per capita per annum is USD 621 and that 18.4% of Indonesians live below the poverty line on less than one dollar a day. However the population's welfare can also be measured by monthly basic needs expenditure. By this measure data shows that the monthly average expenses of over 49% of the population is less than IDR 200,000 (USD 21), which is less than one dollar per day. This would indicate a larger number of people living under the poverty line than reported by official data. Figures from 1993 show much lower poverty levels with only 4.3% of households, or 10% of the population living below the poverty line. These figures might be supported by the 2004 United Nations Development Programme report, whose Human Development Index ranks Indonesia 111st among 177 countries, while in the 2003 UNDP report it was 112nd among 175 countries.

Poverty has a different impact on women and men due to different gender roles and gender bias. Some indicators show that women are in a worse situation than men. The maternal mortality rate is still high, 373 per 100,000 live births and the infant mortality rate is 40 per 1,000 live births. Education is another revealing indicator since it shows that the number of illiterate or under-educated women is twice the number of men. Data from 2002 estimate that 12.79% of women and 5.85% of men are illiterate. However women's contribution to the economy cannot be ignored. Around 33.5% of women carry out unpaid work to ensure the survival of their family and three times as many women as men work overseas in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Korea and

Hong Kong. These female migrant workers get hardly any protection from either the host country or the Indonesian Government during their time away and every year cases of violence against women migrant workers are reported.

Another phenomenon in Indonesia is the increasing number of women heading families, including both widows and single women. The 1993 data showed that 10% of households were headed by women. By 2003 the figure had increased to 13.19% but the number could be higher than the official estimate. Ongoing conflicts in some regions of the country and extreme poverty in others (eastern Indonesia) have motivated men to migrate in search of a better life. They often do so leaving the women behind. Households headed by women are in general relatively poorer compared with those headed by men. Data from 1999 onwards show that the number of female-headed households living under the poverty line is increasing while the rate amongst those headed by men is decreasing.

Poor households headed by women are the poorest in Indonesia. Their average daily income is around IDR 7,000 (USD 0.73) or less than a dollar a day. These households have on average three dependents, and many are located in rural and remote areas. The education level of people in these households is very low; more than half only have elementary school education. Household members work mostly in the informal sector as small traders, daily labourers in small paddy fields, or small farmers.³

The long journey of poverty reduction efforts

In the last ten years, there have been many poverty alleviation strategies, programmes and activities carried out through various poverty alleviation projects developed by the Government as well as by NGOs. Examples include the Underdeveloped Village Presidential Instruction Project, developed by the New Order Government, as well as income-generating projects organized by NGOs. Also an emergency programme for poor people, similar to the social safety network, was also developed prior to the 1997 economic crisis along with the Community Recovery Programme set up by the Government. Despite an in-

crease in the income of poor households and in the satisfaction of basic needs during the period of the project, a more extensive impact on the elimination of poverty was not noticed.

NGOs have developed various community empowerment programmes to organize people and form networks of poor people such as the Urban Poor Consortium, the Network for Women in Small Business, the Indonesian Farmers Association, the Indonesian Labourers Association, and the Women Head of Household Organization. Although these attempts have increased awareness and allowed people to advocate for their rights, they have not been able to bring about great change or reduce poverty.

The latest Government effort is to develop the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) as a guideline for eliminating poverty in Indonesia in order to meet donor institution requirements. However the PRSP concept is still very gender-blind and the involvement of women's groups to review the paper and include a gender perspective in it has met with strong resistance from the male-dominated working team. In addition, the Government has also made a commitment to implement the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to complement its international commitments. The MDGs focus on the issue of poverty and related aspects; however the strategic measures to turn the MDGs into concrete policy have not yet been made clear and the public is still unaware of even the existence of these goals.

Framed by an unjust world

There are many interlinked factors causing the situation in Indonesia.

Socio-economic and political policy is centralized and gender-blind

National data does not always reflect the regional and local situation of the population since Indonesia is an archipelago with vast differences from one region to another. A very centralized and unjust development policy which focuses only on areas close to the capital has led to some areas remaining less developed than others, especially in the eastern part of the country. The proportion of people living under the poverty line is much higher in these areas compared to the national figure. Therefore national data cannot be used to portray the real condition in all areas nor can it be used to develop a national poverty reduction strategy.

¹ National Coordinator of PEKKA.

² The following report adopts the latest data from the National Socio-economics Survey which was conducted in 2002 and the data from the 2000 report.

³ Baseline data of PEKKA from 200 villages in 2003.

Gender discrimination is neither understood nor considered by policy-makers, and this is illustrated by the minor attention paid to social and human resources development problems such as health and education, two problematic areas for women. The budget allocation for both programmes is under 5% of GDP.

Additionally macro-economic policy which focuses on increasing economic growth rates through industrialization, low wages, exploitation of natural resources, and political stability, has ignored the negative impacts of economic development. The urbanization of men leaves women with a double burden, as women are exploited to work for low wages while having to cope as household heads.

The reproductive role of women is regarded as an obstacle to their being active in the production sector. Women must also struggle to prove that their qualifications are equal to those of men in economics and politics. This is reflected by the low presence of women in jobs with high economic value and in the decision-making processes at different levels. In addition, women get paid less than men for doing equal work.

Bureaucracy and corruption in the Government

The major problem of many of the development programmes implemented, including poverty reduction programmes, is the leaking of funds before they reach the poor. An inefficient bureaucracy system and corruption at all levels is part of the system. Consequently, poor people do not benefit from many of the development programmes and the gap between rich and poor continues to widen.

A dominant patriarchal ideology

The prevailing patriarchal ideology leads women to have low autonomy and low social power in their daily lives. Women's autonomy refers to the authority that women have over themselves compared with men, while social power is the authority that women have or do not have over others in their household as well as in society. Several indicators show that poor women have no autonomy or social power. When work is distributed by gender and a woman's primary role is in the household, she becomes doubly burdened when she must work outside the home to overcome her family's poverty. In addition women's low education levels lead to low participation of women in decision-making within their households as well as in society.

Ongoing conflicts

The conflict that hit Indonesia in 1998 led the nation into a situation of chronic poverty, causing many people to lose their livelihood or interrupt their education. Others were stranded in refugee camps and the death of many men has meant that women have had to become household heads under harsh conditions. Economic activities came to a stop and feelings of security and safety were lost, with women and children suffering the most.

Natural disasters

Indonesia lies on a very fragile continent with a high potential for massive natural disasters such as tsunami, earthquakes, volcano eruptions and typhoons. The lack of early warning systems has caused many people to die or lose their property. For example the earthquake and tsunami which hit the Northern part of Sumatra at the end of 2004 killed hundreds of thousands of people and transformed hundreds of thousands more into internally displaced persons. The tsunami caused complete devastation in some areas and much funding is needed to rebuild. In addition the long dry season caused by climate change has caused farmers, especially in the eastern part of the country, to lose their source of production which has led to situations of hunger.

Dependence on donor countries and international financial institutions

With a total debt of USD 144 billion Indonesia is one of the world's most indebted countries. Nearly half of the national budget is absorbed by interest payments on this debt. Consequently Indonesia depends greatly on donor countries and is not independent when it comes to developing its social policy.

Under pressure from donors, the Government adopted structural adjustment programmes to integrate policy into the market system and the global economy. This occurred at the expense of the social rights of the people, who among other losses have sacrificed access to health services. Indonesia's dependence on offshore loans has also caused it to suffer economically and the country had difficulty recovering after the economic crisis hit the Asian region in 1997. Economic growth reached its lowest point in 1998 and the exchange rate of the Rupee against the US dollar declined below 25%.

The impact of globalization

As a member of World Trade Organization (WTO), Indonesia is trapped in the globalized economy, which is very harmful to the country. Its unequal position and status compared to developed countries, causes national economy to be controlled by global economic players such as multi-national corporations. This can be noted from the fast growth of hypermarkets, the fast flow of imported goods, and the creation of free trade zones and free industrial zones in several regions. The presence of global economic players in the local market has caused the death of the small and micro-business sectors, which employed many women and poor people. In addition, the opening up of the global market has caused the privatization of social services such as education and health even though these services are the responsibility of the Government. This has triggered an even wider social gap between rich and poor. Globalization has also caused an increase in the exploitation of women as sex workers. The trafficking of young girls to work as escorts to workers in industrial regions and other countries, has tricked poor women into believing they might have a brighter future.

Moving forward

Under the current circumstances there is no single way to eliminate poverty and injustice. Multiple strategies at different levels should be developed and applied and multiple organizations and countries should be involved.

- In economic terms poverty is linked to income problems. However a plural definition of poverty should be applied since the income definition cannot fully explain poverty, particularly in rural areas where people are materially poor, physically weak, isolated, vulnerable, and helpless.
- Gender-based methodologies, strategies and approaches must be applied to develop poverty reduction programmes. The Beijing Declaration and framework is still valid and relevant and should be used and adopted as a guideline in the development of national poverty reduction policy.
- Decentralized approaches to development policy and strategy must be taken in order to better address regional particularities. Special attention must be paid to conflict areas, remote and isolated areas, as well as less developed areas.
- A clean government system must be promoted and developed by enforcing anti-corruption laws, bringing all corruption cases to trial, and punishing the corrupt.
- All laws, regulations and administrative practices should be revised to secure equal rights and access of poor people, especially women, to economic resources. Rights based approaches in the framework of "justice for all" should be integrated into all laws, policies and regulations.
- Alliances must be built with people at different levels and their livelihood, leadership and advocacy skills must be improved.
- Regional and international strength must be built in to fight economic globalization and the dominance of multinational corporations in order to lobby against the introduction of WTO-related policies which harm poor countries.
- Cooperation between small and poor countries should be strengthened at both the government and grassroots levels in order to diminish the dominance of superpower countries and also in order to lobby donor countries and institutions for debt relief. ■