<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Rural poor and poverty in Indonesia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Hartiningsih, Maria Margaretha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>URL</td>
<td><a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10220/2614">http://hdl.handle.net/10220/2614</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rights</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rural Poor and Poverty in Indonesia

*Maria Hartiningisih

Issues of poverty in Indonesia as well as in the developing countries involve hunger, illiteracy, epidemics and the lack of health services or safe water -- which may not be so central in the more developed countries, where hunger is rare, literacy is close to universal, most epidemics are well controlled, health services are typically widespread and safe water is easy to tap.

Poverty means never having enough to eat, never having enough resources to send children to school and never having enough access to basic health services.

(Mbok Karyo, Wonosari village, Gunung Kidul, Yogyakarta)
Poverty is hunger, loneliness, deprivation, discrimination, abuse and illiteracy.
(Marsi, Narmada, Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara)
Poverty is the squatter mother whose hut has been torn down by the government for reasons she cannot understand.
(Bu Ramsi, Cengkareng, slum area, West Jakarta)
Poverty means jobless.
(Manto, construction labourer, Jakarta)
Poverty is criminal because it does allow people to be people.
It is the cruelest denial of all of us human beings.
(Wardah Havidz, non governmental individual, working with urban poor communities in Jakarta)

Those statements can be seen as configuration to describe what poverty means to the people in Indonesia.

It is in the deprivation of the lives that people can lead that poverty manifests itself. Poverty can involve not only the lack of the necessities of material well-being, but the denial of opportunities for living a tolerable life. Life can be prematurely shortened. It can be made difficult, painful or hazardous. It can be deprived of knowledge and communication. And it can be robbed of dignity, confidence and self respect -- as well as the respect of others.

All are aspects of poverty that limit and blight the lives around 50 millions people in Indonesia or 24,2 percent of the country's population (Central Bureau of Statistic) by the end of 1998. But economist said, the figure is too optimistic. Faisal Basri, one of the Indonesian economists predicted around 117 million or more than 40 percent of the population living below poverty line, after the economic crisis erupted.

It is not so difficult to relate poverty, human rights and rural areas. On a global scale, poverty is a rural problem. Poor countries are predominantly rural people. In Indonesia the problem is also the same. The problem of rural-urban migration, for example, is deep rooted on poverty in the rural areas, since the Government of Indonesia does not bring enough attention to rural development.

Lured by the prospect of food, jobs, service and other opportunities and ever-increasing share of the country's population gravitates to town and cities. Rural poverty thus fuels urban poverty (urbanization of poverty). Most of the migrants are men, leaving women and children behind. But in some provinces, most of the migrants are women, working overseas as domestic helpers.

Thousands of stories have been written about them, and journalists pay a lot of attention on these issues, since export of workers have been targetted as one of the important source to attract foreign currency, at the same time many of the workers have
been violated their rights. Since 1980's, more than 300 workers -- from over 2 million overseas workers -- have been killed during their contract by unreasonable causes and many of the cases remain undisclosed.

What makes children engaged in dangerous work such as jermal (platform fish) especially in North Sumatera, sea-fishing, in deep sea pearl diving, is deeply rooted to absolute poverty in the rural areas. According to Indonesian Children Advocacy Institute (LAAI) in Medan, more than 10 children killed. They were falling into the sea and being drowned during their work contract in jermal for the last two years. Eventhough the Local Government of North Sumatera has been launched the elimination of children working in Jermal, but the businessmen are still trying to persuade children to be working for them.

Children (boys) are preferable to adults workers not only they easily managed by the foreman, but they also have no objection against low wages, long working hours (14 - 15 hours a day), long isolation and separation from their families. In addition, children and young fishermen are risk takers, because most of them are not able to swim, as they come from agricultural environment in the rural areas. Most of them received only Rp 10,000 a week or about Rp 120,000 for a three months periods. Most of the them claimed that their wages were mostly given to their parents.

During the New Order, the contribution of the agricultural sector become smaller and employment opportunities have become fewer. The Soeharto's government paid less attention to the development of agricultural sector in the rural areas.

While significant progress in reducing rural poverty was reported in Indonesia just before the crisis occurred in the country (by the end of 1997), many report concluded that, overall, it has proved false to assume that growth and welfare "trickle down".

Reporting rural poor in the context of human rights cannot be separated from the whole frame of national policy development and how it is implemented. In Indonesia, during the New Order, it is very clear that Soeharto's notion of development is mainly focused on physical plants, technology and infrastructure. Bangun, the root of Indonesian word pembangunan or development means "to build" in a material sense. But bangun also means "to wake up" or figuratively, to enable millions of individuals to improve their lives through heightened awareness.

The later task is not merely to concentrate on economic growth which had been chosen as development strategy by the New Order Government, but to enable people to share in its benefits, and thus to ensure development in a broad popular base.

Today, as we all have witnessed, Indonesia's success in generating aggregate growth in the last 25 years, is only a fake story; it is not based on a strong foundation. It is based on commercial foreign lending and foreign investment, where profit motives are the only goal. The bureaucracy has not done well.

Poverty could not be separated from corruption, which is rampant in Indonesia. Nepotism has been practiced to some extent, that Indonesia today is infamously known as the third largest debtor in the world with more than 140 billion dollar of debt. It is also infamous as the third top ranked corrupt country in the world (GIU, October 1999). In contrast, Soeharto and his family is notoriously known as one of the wealthiest men in the world, with more than 15 billion dollar of asset. (Time, January, 1999).

Development is concentrated only in big cities. Survey data show increasing inequality of incomes within Java's large cities and between Jakarta and the rest of the provinces. Money distribution in
Jakarta alone is 65 percent of the total money circulation in Indonesia.

Total investment in the eastern part of Indonesia was only seven percent of the total investment in 1990-1995. The gap between the rich and the poor is widening. Some rich people could buy New Ice Mercedes easily, or buy shoes, cloths, for millions of rupiahs, living in a palace like houses in an exclusive areas, while others living with unbearable misery. Shopping malls are happened to be an etalase of wealthiness, luxuriousness.

Thousands of children working on the streets, living in a dumpsite areas, and millions of them working as child labourer, dropped out from primary school because their parents need them to work. Many of them are working in dangerous work and hazardous environment which might threaten physical or psychological development such as dangerous self-employed jobs on the streets (basking, selling newspapers and other items), or even in more dangerous activities such as prostitution.

This situation should have been seen as an important factor that could be used (by "misterious group") to make people loot during the May riot in Jakarta, 1998, and they burnt the shopping bulding, while the people still inside the building.

Today, more than 2.5 million children are dropped out from primary school, and the number of children working in the informal sector reach as much as 10 million.

Because the goal of Indonesia's growth was based on increased GNP rather than equity. Poor people are the first victims of what is called "development". Cimacan (a village in West Java) case a couple years ago was one of notorious injustice practiced by Soeharto's cronies in 1991.

People had forced to turn over their property when businessmen needed their land to extent their projects, such as luxurious real estate complexes and golf courses. When the land was taken away, the people were only paid as much as Rp 30 (at that time 1 dollar is equal to Rp 2.250. Their appointment cost Rp 5.000) per square meter of land (last year it was 200.000 rupiah or 35 USD).

They went to the parliament, asked for justice, but they got no appropriate response. They sued in court, lost, appealed to a higher court and lost again.

Ministers often pointed out, "Development is not free. We have to pay for it...."

The question is, who's group have to pay? Poor people. They have to pay for the sake of "development", for the sake to make other people richer by making their life so miserable. But they have no power to ask help for those unfair treatment.

This situation led the farmers to get back their land in July 1998, rights after Soeharto regime fell down. In Cibodas (another village in West Java) where diehard inhabitans were chase out with bulldozers, may only be the tip of the iceberg.

Angry of being driven from their ancestral land, Indonesia's deprived are riding the wave of reformasi to publicly size back what they believe is rightfully theirs. And the government is bracing for a nationwide explotion of land disputes in which, judging by the number of written complaints piling up in parliament, ten of thousands of indonesians have been the victims of alleged collusion between local officials and developers.

Land squabbles have always plagued Asia's golf courses, because of the huge tracts they gobble up. But since they were a symbol of region's prosperity, links flourished. Cibodas is one among 12 courses since 1988 to sprout in the Bogor area, just 40 minutes' drive from Jakarta.
Since Soeharto fell down, at least live of the 12 Bogor courses have been beset by revived land disputes. And farmers have planted corn, cassava and beans on the edges of a sixth golf course.

***

For the last 30 years, the people's quality of life has not significantly increased. According to UNDP Human development Report, economic growth alone could not be considered as the only measure and indicator of one nation's progress. Human development is something beyond the numbers of economic growth. It is an achievement as a result of growth. If economic growth cannot assure people's welfare, then development has failed.

During the New Order, Indonesia has been put in the position of the medium-low group of the countries in the Human Development Index. If the measure of Human Development is supposed to be extended with some element of democracy such as freedom of expression, freedom of speech, access to protection and life's security, Indonesia's rank will slide down into position of low.

Many paradox happened during that time. In 1990, President Soeharto was recognized by FAO for his achievement in Indonesia's rice sufficiency. One year later, Indonesia imported tons of rice from Vietnam and Thailand. No further explanation came from the government about that.

Increasing exports of rice have continued today, partly because of drought and land conversion from agricultural to industrial and real estates.

In 1997, President Soeharto was recognized by UNDP for his achievement in Indonesia's poverty alleviation program. He said, people living below poverty line in Indonesia has been reduced significantly, from 65 percent in 1965 to 12 percent in 1997.

The measure of "below poverty line" was standardized Rp 27.413 (less than 13 dollar at that time) in rural areas per month per capita per month and Rp 38.246 (less than 20 dollar) in urban areas. But the standard was not realistic. In real life, one family with four family members need at least Rp 200.000 in villages and Rp 500.000 for their simple life in the cities.

Indonesia's economic growth was a fake story, given the facts that right after the monetary (and political) crisis occured, hundreds of children across the country die of hunger everyday. An early death looms for thousands of others because their parents are too poor to feed them adequately.

According to Ministry of Health, at least 610 deaths due to marasmus kwashiorkor until March 1999, and 170.000 of the total 300.000 pre-school children died each year from malnutrition. A recent survey conducted by the country branch of Hellen Keller International Organization, in Java showed that up to 5.15 million women on the densely populated island suffer from undernourishment.

The study also revealed that the number of women suffering from myopia caused by insufficient intake of Vitamin A doubled from approximately 75.000 to 150.000. In Jakarta, the percentage of women suffering from Vitamin A deficiencies is twice as high as in rural Bangladesh.

Entering 21st century, Indonesia will have a "lost generation". The term "lost generation" is commonly used for children who miss out on adequate nutrition and health care between the crucial age of six and 24 months of age. At that time a child physical development requires adequate nutrition through breastfeeding and other nutritious foods.

Due to the crisis, people's purchasing power has dramatically dropped and it has affected their spending on food. But actually even before the crisis many Indonesian children and pregnant and lactating mothers did not receive adequate and nutritious food.
Maternal mortality in Indonesia is still the highest in Asia, around 700/100,000 live births. Infant mortality rate in many areas in Indonesia as high as 100 per 1,000 live births. Even though Indonesia is recognized as one of the success stories in the field of family planning and became an example for other developing countries in reducing population growth through reducing fertility rate, but the number of population will keep rising. Economic suffering, the rise of price and difficulties in getting contraceptive may raise fertility rate in Indonesia. This in turn will increase poverty in Indonesia. The economic development will be slow down much more.

But actually, nobody can prove what exactly the rate of population growth, given the facts that there are too many enclaves in this country, where mothers give births for more than five children.

Since family planning program have been implemented in 1970's family planning programme is conceived to be instrumental to the country's economic development. In real terms, women and their body are prone to being instrumentalised for politic-economic purposes. Under an authoritarian regime, the implications are far-ranging.

It is not surprising if Sita Aripuranami, feminist activist, quoted Herbert Feith, described the Indonesian state as the "repressive-developemnt regime and has the ultimatre development agency that legitimises its authoritarian nature well as repressive policies."

Family Planning Program under the New Order regime is constantly reproduced as well as controlled down the lines of state bureaucracy from provincial centers to sub-district to neighborhood and village household reaches further into the affairs of everyday life.

Sita also mentioned in her thesis "reproductive Rights Between Control and Resistance" (1997), there is a certain type of compulsory social reproduction of family planning programme being engineered by the regime without consent from the individual women. Often it happens that the women's disposition is against the policy imposed by the state, yet they, out of fear of harsh treatment, cannot not comply with the policy. The login of brute coercion of the Indonesian developmentalist regime (Feith in Nandy, 1996:270) is certainly at play, although some are less corced than others.

As told by woman in some villages in West Java, in 1991,...Family Planning workers accompanied by the police and army went from house to house took men and women to a site where IUDs were being inserted. Women who refused had IUDs inserted at gunpoint. In another village people who refused to become acceptor were branded as communists; in others, they were threatened with transmigration to outer islands" (Hafidz, in Aripurnami:21).

Another telling example from East Nusa Tenggara (East Indonesian) in 1995, illustrates the coercive character of the policy implementation beyond the scope of official rhetoric.

"...family planning programme? Ho mtoit kau he sa? Why do you ask such question? For your information, I agreed to become a family planning acceptor several months after I had a miscarriage. At that time I almost died. My husband and I could not do anything but to obey and follow the programme the midwife offered. People in my village told us that we cannot argue against this family planning policy. We have to be careful, otherwise the military will shoot us or chase us like chasing a cow." (Kalyanamitra, 1996: 146-147 in Aripurnami ibid, 21)

Reporting rural poor issues should be related to those mentioned above, because poverty has many dimension given the fact...
that poverty is too complex to be reduced to a single dimension of human life. But to be honest, rural areas do not get proper attention from the media in Indonesia, since journalists are working based on issues, and, like development, have been concentrated on the issues in the urban centre.

During the New Order, many journalists often quoted official statements without any further critical analysis, as if the statement is the truth itself. But the political situation right then was not conducive to disclosed the reality, because it was feared to be assumed as the failure of development. The repressive government often warned the media not to cover sensitive issues concerning military involvement in the field of family planning, for example.

Fortunately, Kompas has been giving enough space and commitment to cover any issues on development and their impacts to the people in the villages. In many cases like land dispute and eviction, Kompas has been coming up with the issues bluntly and put them on front-page despite of several warnings to stop them.

However, there have been so many issues which have not been given continuous attention such as environment issues and these issues become actual news such as forest fire. Issues on indigenous people are covered infrequently, but the daily regularly send reporters to investigate on the spot the problems of remote areas, especially those relating to human rights abuse.

Kompas is also giving support to the advocacy group as well as Non Governmental Organization (NGO) and trying to position the paper on the side of the weaker and the weakest, as noted in the motto, 'to console the poor, to remind the established'.

The new atmosphere in the country giving much more hope for the democracy and the media have gained their freedom to uncovered human rights issues in the rural as well as urban areas.

*) Maria Hartiningin, senior reporter of Kompas daily, Jakarta, Indonesia. The paper presented in the seminar on Media and Human Rights, 24 - 26 November 1999 in Bangkok, Thailand.