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Authoritarian Social Organisation, NGO Advocacy Campaigns and the Poorest: an Exploration of Two Indonesian Examples

THE INDONESIAN STATE AND NGOs

Indonesia's organised voluntary sector has a history dating back to the beginning of the twentieth century. These social welfare organisations were established in the health care, social welfare and formal education sectors in response to the government's top-down development approach which had only a limited impact on the poor in a country of enormous geographic and cultural diversity. By the 1960s, new organisations motivated by ideals of self-reliance and emphasising development emerged which began to replace the welfare orientation of the earlier organisations. According to the US PVO PACT, these organisations aimed to:

bridge the gap between the needs of that [disadvantaged] citizenry and the goals of national government programmes. They began by responding to the diverse problems and aspirations articulated at the grassroots level, and then carving out development roles not assumed by government or business.

(Farrington and Lewis with Satish and Miclat-Teves, 1993)

These newly emerging Indonesian NGOs were established with a community focus stressing health, small-scale industry and appropriate technology; others developed with an advocacy orientation which focused upon human rights, the environment, legal aid and consumer protection, sometimes securing media coverage of these issues. As is shown below, this success meant that these NGOs faced a very difficult relationship with the government. Indonesian NGOs with foreign links, including those whose origins have often been
religious groups (Muslim, Catholic or Protestant), have been seen as potentially destabilising political forces. Holloway (1989) observes that the government 'has been particularly worried about groups of village-level organisations whose development activities might mask political agitation.'

Van Tuijl (1994) notes that Law on Social Organisations (No. 8/1985), the so-called ORMAS Law, was the first of many subsequent actions by the Indonesian government designed to put pressure on Indonesian NGOs. The law stipulates, *inter alia*, that social organisations were required to receive government approval before receiving financial aid from foreign organisations. Furthermore, the government is empowered to suspend a social organisation's board and even dissolve an organisation which fails to comply with the Law, disturbs security and public order, or which accepts help from abroad without approval.

While these were unquestionably draconian measures, many Indonesian NGOs were able to avoid them. Among the measures adopted to achieve this was the legal status of many NGOs as foundations rather than as social organisations, effectively exempting these organisations from the provisions of the legislation. And, despite many government threats to extend to the provisions of the ORMAS Law to include foundations, or to enact separate legislation or regulations to have this effect, no such legislation has yet been introduced.

The country's authoritarian political order began when Sukarno replaced parliamentary democracy with 'guided democracy' in July 1959. This effective undermining of the non-military actors in the country's political life established the conditions which permitted the military to act initially as final and subsequently as sole effective arbiter of the country's political life.

Sukarno's successor, Suharto, built upon tradition when laying the foundations of 'New Order' society: on the one hand, he was able to draw upon the respect with which the military were regarded by Indonesian society, not least because of the military's role in the anti-colonial independence struggle with the Dutch and in which he, along with other key military leaders, had played well publicised parts. This pre-independence role had laid the foundations for the emergence of two key perceptions on the part of the army's upper echelons which were widely accepted by the society at large: that the army had an overriding role to play in the defence of the Indonesian nation, and that this legitimated ongoing military