



Conflict Management Strategies in Indonesia: Learning from the Poso experience

Workshop report

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On the 8 December 2009, the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD Centre) and the Indonesian conflict management organisation, Institut Titian Perdamaian (ITP), held a one-day workshop in Poso, Central Sulawesi, on 'Conflict Management Strategies in Indonesia: Learning from the Poso Experience'. The workshop brought together representatives from local government agencies, NGOs, academics, as well as religious and traditional leaders to discuss conflict management strategies in Poso and the progress towards reconciliation and reconstruction achieved to date since the outbreak of the conflict in 1998.

The participation of local government officials and non-governmental actors enabled the sharing of information on conflict management strategies over the past decade; exposed approaches and policies to constructive criticism; highlighted key problems in current conflict management strategies; and generated recommendations for both government agencies and NGOs.

I. Conflict management in Poso

A. Background to the conflict

The violence in Poso was triggered by an incident that took place on Christmas Eve in 1998. It involved fighting between a Christian and Muslim youth in which the latter was subsequently stabbed. Rumours quickly spread and soon assumed religious overtones dividing Muslim and Christian communities. Subsequent incidents triggered more riots and violence between the two communities. In the single bloodiest incident on 28 May 2000, Christian militias massacred 200 Muslim men hiding at the Walisongo Islamic school and destroyed the adjoining village of Sintuwu Lemba.

The underlying causes of the conflict are more complex however and can be attributed to a combination of horizontal and socio-economic inequalities. Historical inequalities between the Christian and Muslim communities were compounded by state-backed Islamisation in the 1990s, which fuelled enmities between the two religious communities. Transmigration of Muslims from other parts of Indonesia altered the religious balance in the region, which heightened tensions and increased Christian anxieties around political and economic marginalisation particularly in the face of scarce resources. During the New Order regime, outbreaks of violence occurred intermittently between Muslims and Christians in the region but were swiftly repressed by the Soeharto Government. Following the collapse of the New Order regime in 1998, the new political context led to intense political competition which exploited religion and identity cleavages.

The conflict may have also been fuelled by the presence of Jemaah Islamiyah, Laskar Jihad and other militant groups coming from outside Poso. Several participants pointed out that the involvement of such militant groups in the conflict stemmed from their participation at the elite level and the mishandling of the situation by security forces. Some reports suggest that these groups were able to garner the support of local Muslims disenchanted with the authorities. However despite sporadic local support, Islamic extremist ideology did not gain a foothold among local communities. Participants said they were more concerned with matters affecting their daily lives such as economic reconstruction, reconciliation and good governance.

As in the Maluku workshop, the conflicting parties accused security forces of bias, torture, reckless firing of live rounds to disperse crowds as well as selling of weapons. Problems of poor coordination between the police and military contributed to the mismanagement of the conflict. The security forces' delay in responding to outbreaks of violence, leaving the civilians unprotected, was also underlined. This, compounded with the perceived lack of commitment from the local Government to resolve the conflict, led to growing disenchantment with the authorities.

B. Conflict resolution efforts

Participants stressed the effectiveness of grassroots and civil society conflict management efforts. Prior to the signing of the Malino Declaration in 2001, numerous initiatives existed at the grassroots level to address conflict and stop violence. In several villages, consensus was forged between religious communities to end fighting. Trading and business continued in some areas and became the starting point for reconciliation. Several villages also cooperated informally to assist people displaced by the conflict.

Women were cited as playing an important role in the reconciliation of the parties. While men engaged in violence, women focused on the survival of their families and protection of children. They communicated with their counterparts across the religious divide and continued trading with each other on the market place. Several of these informal activities became the starting point for reconciliation between the religious communities. However, the role of women and their contribution to conflict resolution have not been fully recognised.

It was only after three years of violence in which an estimated 700 people were killed that the Indonesian Government initiated the Malino process in December 2001. Ten representatives of both religious communities were selected to represent their respective constituencies. A declaration was signed. It consisted of ten key points supposed to address most of the immediate causes of the conflict and ranging from the rehabilitation of infrastructures and return of IDPs to land ownership rights.

The Malino Declaration did not settle the conflict entirely however. Some participants attributed the weakness of the Declaration to several factors including its elitist nature, the lack of consultation at grassroots level, and the local Government's use of quantitative achievements as measures of success in peacebuilding. The binding status of the signed document was also put into question. However, the Malino talks did establish the Socialisation and Reconciliation Team consisting of representatives from each side from each of the affected sub-districts. These teams inspired much of the local reconciliation work.

Other initiatives, led by the local Government, included the formation of working groups to follow up on the implementation of the Malino Declaration and to address security, economic and social issues; the promotion of reconciliation through the creation of an Inter-religious Communication Forum (FKUB) that socialises the importance of religious tolerance to the local communities, restores trust between the conflicting parties and provides an avenue for leaders of both communities to come together and discuss important issues; and a *lembaga adat* or customary body. In addition, facilities were built at the IDP relocated sites and financial assistance provided to those who refused to relocate to the Government allocated sites.

In response to the perceived failure of 'top-down' approaches to reconciliation led by provincial governors, community dialogues between Christians and Muslims were pursued by religious and traditional (*adat*) leaders as well as NGOs. Combatant leaders eventually joined these dialogues. Their presence ensured to a large extent that there

would be no renewed provocations. Locals appeared more confident in reconciliation efforts led by religious, *adat* or other community leaders, than in those led by the central and local Governments.

Reconciliation between IDPs has been mostly initiated at grassroots level through the organisation of meetings between the two religious communities and engaging in symbolic *adat* rituals, which are accepted by the locals regardless of their religion.

Participants were generally critical of local government programmes for being too heavily focused on physical reconstruction and rehabilitation, in contrast with the focus of NGOs and civil society groups on communal reconciliation and IDPs reintegration in the post-Malino phase. In addition, the local Government was criticized for relying heavily on a security approach to the resolution of the conflict.

II. Key problems

The key problem outlined by participants was the lack of follow up on the Malino Declaration.

The number of people tasked with implementing the declaration has been decreasing over the years with a minimal budget to work from. In addition, the ten points of the Declaration are vague and delegates to the peace talks originated mainly from the provincial capital of Palu rather than Poso where the main conflict took place. As such, they were not representatives of the local community directly affected by the conflict.

In 2002, a meeting brought together the signatories to review the implementation of the Malino Declaration. Following this meeting, the working groups set up to work on its implementation, were disbanded and replaced by a Communication Forum, tasked with going down to the sub-district and village levels to socialise the terms of the Declaration, as opposed to the district and provincial levels at which the working groups previously operated. The Forum was not able to function optimally however due to limited resources.

Other outstanding problems include:

- the slow pace of reconstruction of mosques and churches;
- insufficient deployment of security personnel to maintain peace in the region; and,
- the poor management of IDPs, including inability of the local Government to manage data on IDPs, lack of proper documentation on the latter and poor tracking of their movements.

Most of the local Government limitations outlined above are linked to budgetary issues. Participants highlighted its limited operational budget, as well as the central Government's insufficient assistance. Additionally, no evaluation, review and/ or follow up of the peacebuilding and assistance programmes have been undertaken. As a result, there is a lack of information on the needs of the local communities and the types of assistance which are most effective.

The lack of coordination between the local Government and civil society is also a contributing factor to the ineffectiveness of conflict management measures. Participants noted the tendency for various elements in society and government to undertake peace efforts in the region without consulting others. Moreover, the NGOs in Poso are much weaker than and not as well-resourced as those in Palu. Few have the resources to function properly.

Another overarching problem identified by workshop participants is the weak legal framework for conflict management particularly in the context of social conflicts. Existing policies lack the legal weight to deal with problems in Poso and other communal conflicts. A more rigorous law on conflict management is needed to replace the central

and local Governments' reactive handling of conflict. In the absence of a proper legal framework to deal with the instigators of violence, Poso has relied heavily on criminal justice as part of its conflict management strategy. More than 100 instigators have been imprisoned in Poso since 2002.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were put forward by participants:

- To undertake an evaluation of the Malino Declaration and to have an independent body assess the extent and effect of its implementation. The last review was undertaken in August 2002 by its signatories, almost one year after it was signed. Many changes have since taken place but participants' dissatisfaction over issues has not significantly differed from those reported five years ago. As in Maluku, it is recommended that a series of meetings is held to review the implementation of the Declaration's ten points, identify weaknesses and possible action points in response. An independent assessment body was suggested by participants. Its membership could include representatives from all sectors of society, local government, NGOs, religious leaders, *adat* leaders, village heads and the likes.
- The Government should create an accurate and accessible data system at the local level, particularly pertaining to IDPs. An independent team should investigate and resolve problems of data and documentation management. The local Government should seek expert advice and provide training to its staff on the management and maintenance of this data system.
- The Government's peacebuilding policies must include reconciliation and not just physical assistance and reconstruction. This is a common phenomenon among governments and remains one of the greatest challenges. This recommendation, however, contradicts participants' earlier mention that reconciliation efforts led by government figures are often not as well accepted as those led by community leaders and NGOs. Government and non-governmental sectors should thus improve cooperation on reconciliation matters.
- The decision to post security personnel in villages should be reviewed by all stakeholders. The use of security personnel from outside Poso and their insensitivity to local culture have created problems. A consultation process should be launched between local commanders and village heads on this issue.
- Participants suggested that non-governmental actors conduct regular consultations (called, '*Musyawarah Sintuwu Maruso*' - a phrase in local dialect that means 'Strong when united') with all stakeholders in Poso to discuss progress on peacebuilding in region. The purpose is not only to encourage communication and trust building between the two communities, but also to review peacebuilding efforts to date and forge consensus on actions that need to be taken. While there have been many inter-religious forums, few have sustained their efforts to review peacebuilding regularly.

Conclusion

The main problems in Poso are the lack of coordination between stakeholders and lack of follow up on peacebuilding programmes. As stated by one participant: “If the Malino Declaration had been properly implemented and evaluated from the beginning, most of the problems resulting from the conflict would have been resolved.” The same complaint was voiced in Maluku.

The workshop indicated the need for a thorough independent appraisal of conflict management efforts to date in order to identify critical issues that could potentially spark a resurgence of violence.

About the workshop series and project

This workshop, supported by the Government of Canada, is the second in a series of three on regional conflict management in Indonesia. It is part of the HD Centre’s “Comparative Perspectives on Conflict Management in Asia”, a multi-year research project supported by the Asia Security Initiative of the MacArthur Foundation. The goal is to generate fresh analysis on conflict management and prevention in India, Indonesia and the Philippines. The first workshop, held in Ambon in October 2009, provided useful information on conflict management initiatives undertaken by the Government and non-governmental actors in the area. The third and last workshop will be held in West Kalimantan in early February 2010.