



PRESS RELEASE

Asia-wide Regional Workshop on Horizontal Inequalities and Conflict Prevention

27 July 2010 | Jakarta, - Anyone concerned with promoting development and reducing human suffering must make conflict prevention a priority.

Violent conflict in multi-ethnic and multi-religious countries, often fought along ethnic or religious lines, is a major cause of death, destruction, poverty and underdevelopment. The incidence of such conflicts rose steeply immediately following the end of the Cold War and, despite a decline since the mid-1990s, remains a major problem in every region of the world. Violent conflict undermines hard-won gains in human development and poverty reduction. It reduces human capabilities and can prevent the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals for some of the most vulnerable groups in society.

Fortunately, conflict within multi-ethnic societies is not inevitable—in fact, most multi-ethnic societies are peaceful, especially those which promote political and socio-economic development policies that fully encompass different groups, taking their needs into account.

CRISE (see below), together with the UNDP Asia Pacific Regional Centre, the UNDP Indonesia Country Office and the Government of Indonesia (through Bappenas) have jointly hosted an Asia-wide regional workshop on “Horizontal Inequalities and Conflict Prevention” in Jakarta, Indonesia on the 26-27 July. The objective of the workshop was to discuss the policy implications of findings emanating from research on Horizontal Inequalities, which CRISE conducted in eight countries around the world, and to consider comparative experiences from across Asia. This is a part of a series of workshops being held throughout the world. Participants included government and international policy makers, researchers, and representatives from civil society organisations from across the region.

The fundamental conclusion of CRISE research is that the presence of large horizontal inequalities (HIs), that is, inequalities among salient identity groups, increases the risk of violent conflict.

Horizontal Inequalities may be economic, social or political or they may concern cultural status:

Any type of HI can provide an incentive for group mobilisation but conflict is, most likely to occur in areas where economic, social, political and cultural status HIs occur simultaneously, and where some groups are deprived across every dimension. In these situations, group leaders, who face political exclusion, and their potential followers, who see themselves as experiencing unequal treatment with respect to assets, jobs and social services, are likely to be inspired to mobilise and possibly engage in violent conflict.

Policies to correct economic, social and political HIs should be prioritised in multi-ethnic societies—as part of general development policies—especially in post-conflict environments. The workshop discussed policy options for reducing each of the types of horizontal inequality and examined the advantages and disadvantages of different options by looking at experiences where they have been introduced.

Findings of the workshop and the research presented are hoped to contribute to relevant policy making processes in the participating countries from the region. The workshop highlighted innovations from across Asia in policy making which seek to address inequalities and to promote conflict sensitive approaches to development. These kind of inclusive policies take into account the different national and local contexts where people live. Such policies include affirmative action policies, special targeting for disadvantaged groups and regions, improving access to justice mechanisms, as well as institutional reform which promotes inclusion. The workshop also allowed for shared experiences relating to the challenges in redressing inequalities, especially in highly conflict affected regions where horizontal inequalities are deep and violence is in the recent memory of citizens.

CRISE

The Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity (CRISE) at the University of Oxford has been conducting research for the past six years on why some multi-ethnic countries and sub-national regions are peaceful while others have experienced violent conflict.

CRISE, directed by Professor Frances Stewart and funded by the UK Department for International Development, is a multidisciplinary centre, comprising economists, political scientists, sociologists, anthropologists and historians. Its work is conducted jointly with partners in Latin America, Southeast and South Asia and West Africa.

Major conclusions of CRISE research have been published in *Horizontal Inequalities and Conflict: Understanding Group Violence in Multiethnic Societies* (edited by Frances Stewart, Palgrave, 2008; paperback 2010) and on the CRISE website (www.crise.ox.ac.uk).

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