

Indonesian Girls and Young Women Amidst Change

by *Saparinah Sadli*

Au milieu de valeurs changeantes provoquées par les efforts de développement de l'Indonésie, l'éducation des filles et des jeunes femmes suscite un grand intérêt. La promotion

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du droit à l'éducation pour les jeunes filles fait l'objet de cet article qui analyse les programmes gouvernementaux destinés à encourager les familles indonésiennes à envoyer leurs filles à l'école afin qu'elles puissent développer leur potentiel.

One of the most significant milestones in the history of the Indonesian women's movement is the First Congress of Indonesian Women in 1928. The First Congress approved three resolutions: an increase in the number of girls' schools, the obligatory explanation to brides of marriage laws and prevailing divorce practices, and the provision of assistance to widows and orphans of Indonesian civil servants. The campaign for women's rights which has continued since then promotes women's employment and women's and girls' education.

The right to vote was granted to Indonesian women during World War II and after Indonesia attained independence in 1945, the principle of equality was ingrained in the State Philosophy, *Pancasila* (The Five Pillars). The 1945 Constitution makes no distinction between men and women, guaranteeing equal rights, obligations, and opportunities in all fields of nation-building. Conse-

quently, this principle is embodied in all Indonesian regulations and legislative acts.

Attention to the potential contribution that women can make to Indonesia's social and economic development efforts and progress is contained in the 1978

Broad Guidelines of State Policy, the basis of Indonesia's Third Five-Year Plan. To underscore Indonesia's political commitment to equal partnership between

men and women in all aspects of nation-building, and to facilitate women's participation in national development, an Associate Minister for the Role of Women was appointed in 1978. The government's further recognition of women's contribution to national development efforts led, in 1988, to the position being elevated to State Minister for the Role of Women. Indonesia's political commitment to the rights of women is also reflected in Indonesia's ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Types of Discrimination Against Women (Convention on Women) in 1984.

Indonesia is currently beginning its Sixth Five-Year Development Plan (1994-1999) and its Second 25-Year Development Plan. The development policies and programs are guided by three interrelated national goals: equity, economic growth, and dynamic national stability. These goals are a continuation of the policies established by the First 25-Year National Development Plan. However, whereas the earlier State Guidelines focus mainly on women's domestic role, the current chapter on women emphasizes the importance of women's economic role. A call for an increased awareness of both parents' (as opposed to only the mother's) role

as family educators is a significant change which promotes equal responsibility for child care between women and men.

Furthermore, since 1992, the State Minister for the Role of Women has been instrumental in developing Women's Studies Centres at both the central and provincial level in public and private universities. These centres are responsible for conducting research and training on the status of women and making recommendations at the provincial level.

The most significant changes have, therefore, been the gradual broadening of the various governmental mechanisms for promoting the advancement of women beyond the traditional area of women's domestic role. This includes the integration of women's concerns into the general mandate of sectorial ministries, indicating a recognition on the part of the government of the need to incorporate a gender dimension in the programs of the various ministries.

Apart from the many women's organization affiliated to the government, there are various women's religious groups which also have programs aimed at improving the status of women. In the past few years, a number of groups consisting of young women activist have also been formed, focusing in particular on the plight of rural and urban women workers. These newly formed activist groups are drawing attention to women's rights and issues which, traditionally, have not been endorsed by the bigger and more established women's organizations in Indonesia, such as property rights, opposition to rape, sexual harassment, and domestic violence.

To facilitate the advancement of women and to promote their equal rights as citizens, the government as well as various non-governmental women's organization have thus brought about many changes in the lives of Indonesian women, particu-

larly for girls and young women. As a result, more girls and young women than ever before are making use of the various opportunities now open to them.

The education of Indonesian girls

Indonesian girls in general are now better educated than ever before. Nevertheless, official statistics demonstrate that the education of the girl child in Indonesia is still problematic. Although there is little overt discrimination against girl children studies have shown that girls drop out of school for very traditional reasons, such as to help their mothers with household chores, or because they are expected to marry at a younger age than their brothers. The fact that parents do not want daughters approaching adolescence to walk long distances to school by themselves is another factor in a family's decision to end a young girl's education. Many parents, particularly in the rural areas, still do not see the need nor do they have the means to send their daughters to school beyond the elementary level.

Although recent statistical data show that significant gains have been made in the area of girls' education, these gains are still very much concentrated at the primary school level, with the percentage of girls in the urban area slightly higher than boys (Central Bureau of Statistics 1989; 1992). This pattern, however, changes when the level of education gets higher. Girls' and young women's education continues to remain behind that of boys at junior, senior, and university levels. Girls and young women are also under-represented in both general and vocational secondary schools.

However, the percentage of girls in secondary schools did increase from 44 to 60 per cent in 1984-1985 and to 65 per cent in 1990-1991. This is largely due to the inclusion of female-oriented specializations, particularly office studies, trades, and cooperatives. At the tertiary levels, data from the 47 public universities

(excluding the University of Indonesia) show that women comprised 41 per cent of the graduates in the 1987/1988 academic year. There still is a need to develop gender-sensitive curricula by eliminating stereotyped views of women and providing positive role models for female students.

In an effort to provide the much needed role models for Indonesian girls, a book on women in science featuring short biographies of Indonesian women who have attained the highest academic degrees (doctorates or professorial degrees) has recently been published (Sadli and Dhakidae). A second volume is presently being prepared as in the last few years a relatively high number of young women have finished their doctorates, in Indonesia or abroad, or have become professors. This is a very recent development in Indonesia.

Promoting the education of girls has become a national concern. The Government of Indonesia, and in particular the President of Indonesia, has stressed the need to pay more attention to the education of the girl child within the context of increasing the quality of life of the Indonesian family as a whole.

Developing the potential of the young child, including the girl child, is conceptualized in the national program called *Bina Keluarga Balita* (enriching children under five through

is to enable them to stimulate their child's cognitive potential at an early age. This program is attended by young mothers, many of whom are uneducated, in more than 100,000 villages all across the country. A recent development in this program is to include fathers and other family members. Although the program is not exclusively directed to girls, it is aimed indirectly at motivating young rural mothers/parents to keep their girls in school and allow them to finish their basic education (compulsory education is now nine years).

Young Indonesian women amidst change

More and more young women are joining the work force as a result of rapid economic growth and the process of industrialization. Better education and the push to improve standards of living have also boosted the number of women in the work force. As a result, young Indonesian women are adopting "new" attitudes and behaviour patterns.

Young rural women with limited education, coming from mostly low-income families, and many of them still in their teens, are looking for jobs in the newly established industrial areas on the outskirts of the cities. Because they usually lack the necessary skills to compete in the workplace,

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enriching their families). This program was launched by the Minister for the Role of Women in 1980 to celebrate the International Year of the Child. It is aimed, in particular, at young mothers of children under five living in the rural areas. The program helps young mothers develop child rearing skills based on developmental psychology principles. The objective

and do not understand the social skills needed to live in a big city, most are low-wage earners. They are not always well prepared to adjust to their new surroundings, nor are they protected from various types of abuse in the workplace as well as outside the workplace. Many of the young women are ignorant about their rights as workers and as women. Many are

also not aware of existing laws which can protect them from potential ill treatment in the workplace. This problem is even more serious for young women who are working in the informal sector where formal protection is non-existent.

An emerging problem is unwanted pregnancy, which results in the loss of their jobs or no compensation when they take a pregnancy leave (although against the law). Within the existing

important role in improving working conditions for women. Since restriction on strikes have been lifted, cities like Jakarta have seen unprecedented waves of strikes by factory workers, primarily young women. The young women who are trying to fight for their rights do not receive the necessary social support. The tragic story of Marsinah, the young female factory worker who was mysteriously murdered after leading a successful strike against management, has further enhanced the national as well as international attention paid to the plight of young women workers in Indonesia.

An increasing number of young Indonesian women are migrating as overseas workers, both legally and illegally. Ninety-six per cent of the official migrant workers are employed in domestic services. They are concentrated in countries like the Middle East as well as other countries in the ASEAN region. Most of these young women come from poor families with low levels of education. This, too, is a relatively new phenomenon.

Although still a minority, the number of young women with academic backgrounds entering the workforce is increasing. These young women can be considered "trendsetters" among their peers. Many are the first generation of university educated children in the families. Some have double degrees completed at foreign universities. This is a brand new development and partly reflects young women's current aspirations, especially from the middle and upper socio-economic classes. These young women are not strongly attached to traditional values, and for various non-economic reasons they consciously want to combine family life with careers. This is also a new development for the Indonesian family. These young women are pursuing their career and family aspirations without any role models available to

them. Parents, husbands, extended family members, as well as government officials often voice their concern and criticism when these young women are judged as neglecting their family duties. However, this does not discourage them, with or without family responsibilities, to aspire to and achieve the highest educational level possible. A study on the aspirations of young working women between the ages of 25 to 35 years (married and unmarried) has shown that: independence and a "balanced life" is high on their priority list (Purwandari 1993).

Another study of the aspirations of children and teenagers has found that the aspirations of teenage girls are as high as those of teenage boys (Purwandari 1994). Interestingly, the findings show that none of the teenage girls explicitly state that having a family is more important than having a career or profession. However, a traditional is reflected in the finding that their aspirations are still directed to the more conventional female jobs despite high aspiration level in the field of hard sciences. This study effectively demonstrates the role a family can play nurturing their daughters' educational aspirations.

Nevertheless, it is still disturbing that even the young women with academic degrees are not always able to fight for their rights and feel powerless in the face of discrimination on the basis of gender in the workplace.

The "Convention Watch"

In 1994 the Women Studies Program at the University of Indonesia formed a working group called "Convention Watch" to monitor the implementation of the Convention on Women. It was felt that despite Indonesia's ratification of the Convention in 1984, Indonesian girls and young women, in general, continue to face gender discrimination at every level and women workers' rights, in particular, have yet to be effectively protected. The working group thus chose to focus attention on Chapter 11 of the Convention in recognition of the

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social-cultural context, sex education or reproductive health education for unmarried young women is still considered taboo. Empowering these young women with skills and knowledge, including knowledge about reproductive health issues should be given serious consideration.

Young women with senior high school education are crowding the formal workplace as clerical workers or other similar types of jobs which require limited skills. However, as workers in the formal sector, young women with limited skills are easily replaced by others who are waiting in line to get any job at all. Their bargaining power as workers is still minimal because most of these young women possess only basic education.

This push into the job market by young women with limited skills and education is a manifestation of new needs among Indonesian young women. Compared to their mothers, these young women are eager to make use of the new opportunities now open to women despite continued gender discrimination in the workplace. Some of them consider it normal that they are not given the same rights as their male co-workers.

Government sponsored labour organizations, dominated by men in leadership roles, do not play an im-

fact that although labour force participation of young women has increased significantly since the 1980s, many problems remain both in the private and public sectors. Women workers are still excluded from training opportunities, partly because of the women's own lack of awareness as well as expectations that women will "not be interested or not available" due to family constraints

The members Convention Watch consist of women from academe with different disciplinary backgrounds such as sociologists, lawyers, psychologists, political scientists as well as practicing lawyers, and young women activists. The members vary in age as well as in their experience and knowledge of the Convention.. One of the members has for years been actively involved at the International level in discussions about the Convention. Two other have extensive experience in the process as well as in the preparation of teaching material about the Convention at the Law Faculty of the University of Indonesia. Many of the working group members, however, have not had any experience with the Convention at all. One of the other reasons for establishing the working group was also, therefore, to disseminate information about the Convention to a wider audience.

The Convention Watch working group thus embarked on a program aimed at increasing awareness of the content of Chapter 11 of the Convention. This special effort includes media campaigns, holding workshops with various groups in the society, a dialogue with the Minister of Manpower and his staff about women workers' rights, the development of a leaflet about worker's rights aimed at employers and their women workers, as well as holding training sessions with members of the national women's organization, KOWANI, for further dissemination of the Convention. The objective was to promote the implementation of the Convention, in particular Chapter 11, as a national priority as well as to empower young women with knowl-

edge about their rights and responsibilities, and in particular in their role as workers.

This year the Women's program at the University of Indonesia has planned to establish a Convention Watch Centre to disseminate the result of various studies conducted by the working group. It hopes to become an information center about "women's rights as human rights," focusing, in particular, on women workers' rights. It also aims to attract the attention of a wider audience to the implementation of the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Types of Discrimination Against Women.

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Based on a survey of individuals from a wide variety of backgrounds regarding their agreement with a set of nine fundamental statements about women and families, *Family Feminism* represents an assessment of current attitudes and beliefs about the status and rights of women and the standing of feminism in today's society. The results, accompanied by comments from individuals surveyed, scholars and the authors, will sometimes surprise, but essentially these statements will assist individuals in determining their own feelings with regard to women, families, feminism and themselves.

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