

Nordic Indonesia Studies Network (NISN)
Second annual workshop
NIAS, Copenhagen, April 21-22, 2010

ACTIVITY REPORT

Introduction

The Nordic Indonesia Studies Network (NISN) second annual workshop was held at the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS) in Copenhagen from April 21 to 22. The workshop included lectures by Indonesia experts and researcher training of Indonesia students at master and PhD levels.

Similar to our inaugural workshop, we deliberately kept a broad focus for this year's workshop, "Developing Indonesia". This focus allowed us to have contributions from various scholarly disciplines, including political science, anthropology, economics and history, and a wide range of perspectives on development issues in the region. The workshop was open to all scholars and students with an interest in these topics.

This year, our workshop unfortunately coincided with the Icelandic ash cloud. This meant that some of our keynote speakers and a number of participants were not able to arrive. This required some last minute changes to the workshop programme. Due to the smaller number of participants we shortened the workshop from three to two days, thus ending it on the evening of 22nd April.

We ended up with 1 keynote speaker and 20 participants.

Aims and organisation of the workshop

The workshop aimed to facilitate discussion of research on or relating to Indonesia within the social sciences in the Nordic countries. The bulk of participants were from the Nordic countries. We also had participants from Indonesia, the Netherlands, the United States, and Germany.

The organisers worked up until the evening prior to the workshop with setting out a new format that as far as possible would still accommodate our priorities for the workshop and the good number of participants that were fortunately still able to attend. Though the workshop turned out somewhat differently than originally planned, changes made to the programme that resulted from the ash cloud contributed to the informal setting we have envisioned for our annual workshops. We now had plenty of time for group discussions and for more informal communication between participants.

We had initially planned to alternate between keynote speakers and presentations in smaller groups. Due to the limited number of keynote presentations, we opted instead for

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a more thorough focus on group discussions and researcher training. For each of our annual gatherings, we have stressed the workshop aspect.

This year, we received generous support for our activities from the Danish Development Research Network, the Asia House Fund, the Graduate School of International Development Studies at Roskilde University. From last year, we had transferred funding from the Swedish School of Advanced Asia-Pacific Studies.

The Nordic Institute of Asia Studies in Copenhagen hosted us for workshop sessions. Furthermore, Asia House hosted all the participants at a reception held on Asia House. Ole Wiberg provided a welcoming address and introduced the participants to the place and the history of Asia House. This new contact with Asia House is a promising opportunity for the network to have closer ties with Danish business communities with an interest in Asia. Ole Wiberg noted among other things the remarkable Indonesian growth rate recently, and specifically stressed Asia House's increasing attention to and interest in Indonesia. We hope to strengthen and broaden our future activities with this new collaboration.

Again this year, his Excellency Abdul Rahman Saleh, former Attorney General of Indonesia and current ambassador to Denmark, generously hosted a dinner for all the workshop participants at his residence.

Content of the workshop

The workshop lasted two days.

On the first day, the organisers provided a brief introduction, followed by a welcome speech by the Indonesian Ambassador to Denmark, Abdul Rahman Saleh. The ambassador sketched the main economic and political achievements of the Indonesian government under a democratic regime. He also drew attention to some of the main challenges Indonesia faces in furthering a stable and sustainable economy. He noted three issues in particular: First, the still widespread corruption that among other things is the focus of the government's Corruption Eradication Commission; second, combating terrorism; third, making decentralisation work to strengthen the accountability of political decision-makers and administrative staff, at the level of decision-making as well as the level of implementation. Against this background, the ambassador noted the need for open public and scholarly debate on these issues, and thereby opened the workshop.

Gerry van Klinken took his role as the only keynote speaker in stride and provided an interesting presentation on his work in West Timor, entitled "Don't write that": Researching provincial biographies in Indonesia". History making and political

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biographies in Indonesia have typically been domains of the state. Van Klinken discussed ethical and methodological challenges in researching biographies and the tensions between official, national history and local histories and gaps between public and private biographers, with a specific focus on the 1965-1966 massacres of suspected communists. This provided a fruitful entry point to understanding changes in political culture and state-civil society relations over time.

The second day was the researcher-training day where participants were divided into three groups. The day began with a short introduction to the intended format of the group sessions. Group sessions were planned to have been chaired by keynote speakers, but instead Gerry van Klinken chaired one group session whilst the organisers chaired the remaining two.

The papers discussed a wide range of issues relating to development in Indonesia, including agricultural development, decentralisation processes following Suharto, agrarian expansion on Indonesia's borderland areas in Kalimantan, and finally, in Indonesia's former province, newly independent Timor-Leste.

Feedback from participants

Again this year, feedback from our workshop participants has been overwhelmingly positive. In spite of the last minute changes to the programme, people were excited with the opportunity to have feedback and discussion of 'work-in-progress', rather than finished work as is usually the case at academic conferences. Again, participants also responded positively to the mix of senior researchers, PhD students and Master's students.

In summary, though the workshop turned out differently than originally planned, we have been very pleased with the progression of the event and had only positive response from the participants.

Future activities

In the coming weeks and months, we will plan future activities of the network. This includes our next annual workshop, but we also intend to hold a number of smaller activities in the coming year, so as to keep a lively and ongoing communication and collaboration between researchers and students and others with an interest in Indonesia.

It is our hope that we can invite some of the 'missing' keynote speakers for future events. We had been particularly excited with the strong group of researchers from around the world who had accepted our invitation to provide keynote presentations, and had been looking forward to their presentations. Hence, we would like to invite those who were unable to come for seminars and other smaller events later in the year. In effect, we will

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divide our 'Developing Indonesia' workshop into smaller parts; one-day seminars built around one or two keynote speakers.

The organising group has been strengthened in the previous year, both by several new graduates from Southeast Asia Studies at Copenhagen University, and by new representatives in other Nordic countries. We are currently discussing having a presentation at the European Association of Southeast Asia Studies in Göteborg this summer, in order to network with other researchers working in the region, and strengthen the Nordic aspect of the network.

As regards outreach, the Asia correspondent Jørgen Siegumfeldt from *Danmarks Radio* joined the workshop and carried out interviews with several participants.

The organising group has now made a new website, where future activities, network sponsors and members are listed.

How to join?

If you take an interest in Indonesia, and would like to get an update and/or join activities in the network, please contact us at the following addresses:

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