

## REVIEWS

**INDONESIA BETRAYED: HOW DEVELOPMENT FAILS.** By Elizabeth Fuller Collins.  
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Accounts of Indonesian development seem to describe two different countries. The World Bank, for example, is known to stress the nation's recovery from the 1997 crisis and laud the government's development spending and the overall growth rate. In this book, Collins depicts the other side of Indonesian development: the removal of people from their land, irrevocable damage to the environment, mass relocations to cities, and widespread unemployment. Through the stories of *reformasi* activists, workers, and farmers, Collins denounces neoliberal economics and advocates a return to the security and sustainability of smallholder agriculture.

*Indonesia Betrayed* focuses on the province of South Sumatra between 1994 and 2005, years of radical change yet troubling continuity for Indonesia. Collins focuses on the work of Lembaga Bantuan Hukum (LBH) (Legal Aid Institute), an NGO which provides legal services for the poor. The need for NGOs like LBH grew out of the collapse of oil prices in 1982, when the government turned to the archipelago's rich timber resources to service its ballooning foreign debt. A rampantly corrupt government bureaucracy colluded with international conglomerates to harvest natural resources while impoverishing the residents of lowland forests. Meanwhile, the New Order regime trumpeted "development" as a justification for its military-orchestrated state violence and denial of civil rights.

In its six central chapters, *Indonesia Betrayed* analyzes the key aspects of South Sumatran development: land ownership, environmental degradation, labor rights, corruption, local autonomy, and Islamic activism. These issues merge in the case studies presented in the book, as in a case involving PT Musi Hutan Persada (MHP), a forestry company which was granted a concession in the forest around the town of Pelawe:

When MHP brought in heavy equipment to clear-cut the forest and prepare land for an acacia plantation, villagers mobilized to stop the harvest of timber and to preserve their rubber trees. The village headman was told that the land was now owned by Tutut, Suharto's daughter. To quash opposition to MHP, the district military command established a camp next to Pelawe. Everyday the troops 'exercised' by running through the village. (p. 69)

Ultimately, the village head agreed to include the land in a concession to a third company, despite the objections of the villagers who actually farmed the land.

In Collins's account, numerous factors – global and local – conspired to deprive these people of their livelihoods. Economic policies that promoted cash export crops shifted profits from local workers to capital-wielding investors and educated technical advisors. The World Bank's "nucleus-plasma" scheme encouraged the corporate expropriation of land and the subjection of participating sharecroppers to insurmountable debt. At the national and provincial levels, forestry legislation declared all forested land to be the property of the state, contravening local customary law (*adat*) which granted individual rights to cultivated land and communal rights to forested areas. As a result of the government's claims on natural resources, elections in the *reformasi* period constituted a race for these resources with votes for sale to the highest bidders. Judges and protestors were paid off in environmental lawsuits involving the toxic runoff from mines and factories. Interestingly, Collins depicts Islamic civil organizations and political parties as beacons of hope for the eradication of corruption, and Islam provides the moral compass for most of the activists she profiles.

The book's theoretical framework – the opposition of capitalism and democracy – wears thin at times. Though compelling, Johnson's case studies are asked to carry some heavy freight and create a damning picture of development undertaken through the partnership of

the state and international corporations. But the book's strength, its passionate focus on a handful of South Sumatran "hot spots," may preclude it from making this larger case about Indonesia as a whole, let alone level a global indictment. Collins's contention that "the gap between rich and poor continues to grow wider despite fifty years of Western-sponsored 'development'" (p. 6) is sobering, but it fails to take into account the success stories of international development.

This book masterfully exposes apologetic arguments for the Indonesian government that attempt to downplay its abuses and exaggerate its achievements. Collins's book details exactly what acts conglomerates have engaged in, and the picture is not flattering. This book will be a worthwhile edition to a Southeast Asian collection, but its well-documented case studies can also provide compelling pieces of evidence in the larger case for a more human-centered development.

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