

Community Radio as an Alternative Model toward a Long Term Reconciliation in a Post-Conflict Area: The Case of Poso¹

Abstract

Poso was among regions in Indonesia which suffered from a protracted conflict that to a large degree have threatened the country's political stability. This article examines the dynamics of Poso conflict and reviews peace building assistance provided by both national and foreign donors. It then suggests the concept of community radio as an alternative model which is expected to function as a model for both sustaining the process of reconciliation in a long run and for implementing the concept of positive peace.

I. Introduction

The demise of Suharto on May 21, 1998 has brought about unprecedented changes in Indonesia. Indonesia was crippled not only in economic sector following the Asian Crisis in the late 1990s, but also in social and politics. Horizontal conflicts were among the ramifications of the so-called 'Reformasi' movement initially aiming to topple the peak hierarchy of Orde Baru: Suharto. However, in fact, the success of shifting the national leadership was not the ultimate goal of 'Reformasi'. After being politically suffered in an authoritarian atmosphere under Suharto regime, Indonesians could not instantly witness the fruits of 'Reformasi' as they had to grapple with subsequent racial, ethnic and sectarian conflicts throughout the country. Among the most terrible conflict cases is Poso.

Poso case is an obvious example of an intricate conflict caused by multi-dimensional factors. Some analysts argued that this was a religious conflict due to the fact that Muslims and Christians were plunged into war, while others saw that this was no more than the result of the old regime mismanagement in the sphere of economic distribution. These two approaches are not completely incorrect as the observers employed different viewpoints and emphases in analyzing the issue. This essay will examine causes and dynamics of Poso conflict and then proposed a

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long term attempt to sustain peace in the region through a community radio model.

II. Causes and Dynamics of Poso Conflict

Poso is one of ten districts in Central Sulawesi province with population around 275,974 people. Its religion composition is mainly polarized into two: Islam (50%) and Christian (40%). The following are the causes and dynamics of the conflict.

2.1. Structural Causes

Following the fall of President Suharto (1967-1998), the state has been reluctant to take swift and decisive military measures to deal with numerous conflicts due to international pressure on its violent military approaches to clamp down on social unrest and separatism in the past. As a result, protracted subsequent civil wars in the country could not be handled quickly.

It was also argued that Poso conflict was instigated by some factions in military who dislike the discourse of 'Military Reform' aimed at removing military's social and political roles. Since its inception, Indonesian military had been assigned not only to safeguard the nation but to actively engage in social and political affairs (well-known as dual function), enabling it to effectively penetrate the society to such an extent that rendered civil supremacy helpless. This dual function, however, inevitably facilitated middle to high rank military personnel to run illicit business with conglomerates, gaining profits from security services they offered. Threatened by public demands on the removal of dual function which is tantamount to losing its economic resources, military was considered the mastermind behind these conflicts with an obvious attempt to maintain the status quo.

The second structural cause is social injustice and uneven development that were prevalent during Suharto regime. It is not unusual that in the past economic development had been focused on enriching the capital city of Jakarta and other big cities in Java Island, while outer islands remained discriminated, if not fully ignored. Trijono, a Gadjah Mada University sociologist, believed that when the development process is centered-oriented, it engenders power-sharing mechanism for both Muslim and Christian political communities in Poso more difficult to achieve. It is in Poso case that the fact of struggle for gaining greater political power among many interested parties using ethnic and religious sentiments has become the subsequent cause emanated prior to the lack of power sharing mechanism.

2.2. Trigger

A fight between youths from Muslim and Christian communities on December 25 1998 is believed to have been the trigger of the conflict. This fight, though not the main cause of conflict, played an important role in sparking tensions between Poso people which was eventually followed by bloody war and houses burning. It is most likely that because of this trigger that some observers tend to see the conflict from religious viewpoint.

2.3. Causes Prolonging the Conflict

The first cause that prolonged the conflict is Laskar Jihad, a paramilitary group set up by Jafar Umar Thalib and was allegedly working under the auspices of military, exacerbated the situation on the ground at least up until October 2002 before declaring a self-disbandment in a way that they, together with local Muslim fighters, waged a war against Christian fighters.

The second is political rivalries between local elite that vied for lucrative posts in local executive and legislative institutions had colored the conflict dynamics. Benefiting from two major religious cleavages in the society, elite could accordingly exploit religious sentiments for their own political interests.

Figure I. Causes of Poso Conflict

Structural Causes	Trigger	Causes Prolonging Conflict
<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Regime changes➤ Military involvement➤ Long history of authoritarianism	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Youths fight between Muslim & Christian communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Paramilitary involvement➤ Internal Political Rivalries➤ Military'

2.4. Conflict Dynamics Up To Peace Agreement

Since conflict erupted in December 1998 death toll had been estimated as high as 2000. During the conflict up until 2000, many people left Poso and became IDPs; about 58,000 of them fled to South Sulawesi, 25,000 to other districts in Central Sulawesi. On December 20 2001, A Malino declaration was signed by two

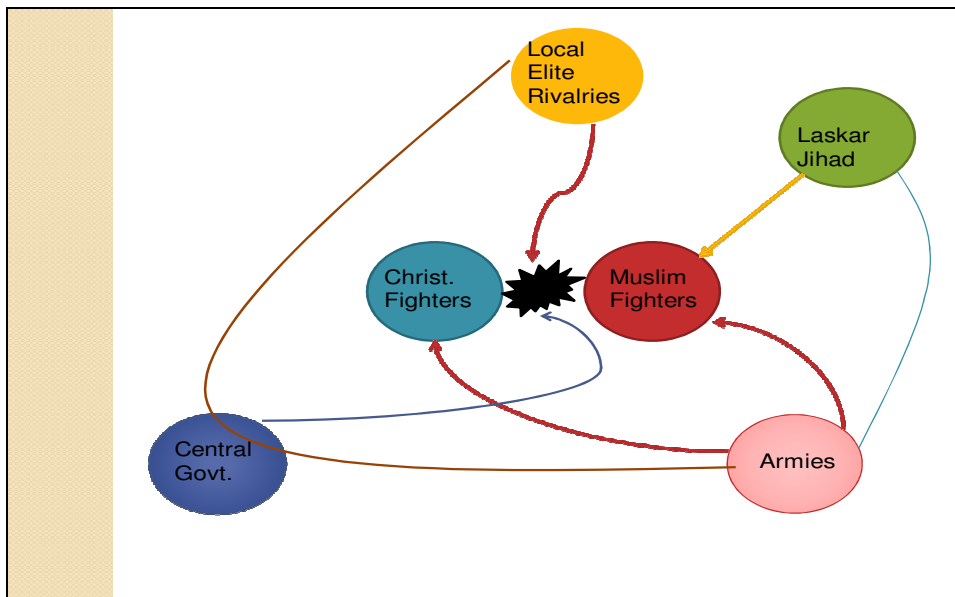
warring parties to end conflict and create peace in Poso. This peace was mediated by then Coordinating Minister for People's Welfare Mr. Jusuf Kalla It has 10 points that principally committed to ceasing all conflicts and disputes in Poso.

2.5. Conflict Dynamics Post Agreement

Despite the fact that in December 2001 the conflict ended up being resolved by a supposedly legitimate peace agreement, it did not nevertheless end for a long time. Indeed, there were some ensuing events, though Laskar Jihad had disbanded itself, which showed that the conflict was far from being over. Some of the important events were as follows:

- ✓ In October 2002, Laskar Jihad announced its self-disbandment and its members gradually left Poso for their hometowns in Java;
- ✓ On May 29 2003, two men from Marowo, a village east of Poso were shot. One, a Muslim died from a neck wound, and his brother in-law, a Christian, was injured;
- ✓ On June 2 2003, the village of Kapompa was attacked with houses riddled with automatic fire. A Christian man was killed. On the same day, another man was shot dead in his home in Poso;
- ✓ On June 27 2003, a Christian party held at Kawula village, Poso had a bomb thrown at it, but no one was injured;
- ✓ On October 2003, Betelemen village in Morowalu district, Central Sulawesi was attacked with bombs and guns fired by Muslim fighters. A man and woman were shot dead;
- ✓ On November 11 2003, a bus was hit with a low-explosive bomb in Tentena;
- ✓ In May 2005, a bomb attack in Tentena saw 22 people killed and 30 injured;
- ✓ On October 29 2005, four Christian girls were attacked with machetes, with three beheaded;
- ✓ On 12 August 2006, Fabianus Tibo, Dominggus da Silva and Marinus Riwa, men indicted for being responsible of causing Muslim-Christian violence were executed.

Figure II: Poso Conflict Map



→
(Straight arrow denoting direct relationship)

↪
(Curved arrow denoting indirect relationship)

III. Review of Existing Peace Building Assistance

There are some actors playing a role to provide peace building assistance in Poso. They can be categorized as national and foreign players. In the national level both NGO and central government have contributed to mitigating the impact of the protracted conflict. Both central and some local governments provide the following assistance:

A. Central government

- ✓ Life Assurance: a certain amount of money given to IDPs/victims per week/month;
- ✓ Simple House and House Building Materials: the central government made efforts to both build simple house for IDPs and provide house building materials to be used by victims to rebuild houses.

B. Local government

- ✓ Humanitarian assistance such as food is also provided by some local

governments, particularly in Sulawesi area.

Meanwhile major international players such as World Food Program, JICA, bilateral donors, CARE, too, provide such material assistance as follows:

- ✓ Tons of rice;
- ✓ Emergency shelter of at least 3.5 m² per person of covered floor area;
- ✓ Tools and seeds (about 11 crops) to start and recover livelihoods;
- ✓ Facilitated community consensus on shelter assistance such as design and siting;
- ✓ Facilitated IDPs families to self-design their shelter based on their individual needs, capacity, resources, cultural preferences and level of CARE assistance.

The aforementioned assistance certainly focused largely on material assistance. Such assistance, though helpful, cannot address an ideal long term peace building process that will sustain peaceful atmosphere in the region. It is, however, difficult to guarantee that the conflict will not re-erupt if a long term peace building effort is not addressed.

IV. Community Radio as an Alternative Model of Peace Building Effort

Considerable reliance on Indonesian central government to sustain peace in the region is not a good solution, if not helpless. Though material assistance is vital for Poso people to survive, the concept of positive peace as argued by Prof. Muhadi Sugiono can hardly be implemented if there is no proper action to address a long term peace building effort. After being torn apart by approximately 6-year-old war, Poso nevertheless remains fragile and future conflicts may arise anytime. Accordingly, as an alternative model of a long term peace building action, the author suggests the concept of community radio.

In an attempt to put the idea of positive peace into practice, people need to be well-educated and well-informed about how important it is to sustain peace. A community radio as opposed to commercial radio is considered an effective tool to disseminate the ideas of positive peace that can position itself as an independent player, therefore addressing the non-material needs of Poso people such as peace education, non-biased information and so forth.

Community radio is so influential that it can create an emerging public sphere for the local community, including a space for youths and other disadvantaged groups to discuss solutions to local socio-economic problems. In addition, community radio is also regarded as a powerful means to create a social network.

Although radio is sometimes accredited little status in the public sphere, it is a significant element in the private lives of individual listeners (Barker 1998; Lewis 2003; Mchakulu 2007).

The following is a proposed model of Poso community radio in response to target a long term peace building effort:

A. Name of the Program

Poso Community Radio with the slogan of “For the better future of Poso”

B. Type of Program

Poso Community Radio is a non-commercial radio which works for the sake of community building.

C. Background

Given that the government assistance in Poso has been mainly focused on materials such as food, weekly/monthly life assurance, housing, etc., efforts to target assistance at a long term reconciliation process therefore need to be addressed.

D. Objective

This program aims at creating peaceful environment in Poso through community radio in which its both ‘On-Air’ and ‘Off-Air’ programs will hopefully promote reconciliation among people from various ethnicities and religions.

E. How it will work?

Poso community radio has two main activities consisting of ‘On-Air’ and ‘Off-Air’:

- ✓ ‘On-Air’ is a regular activity of the community radio which offers various such educative and informative as well as interesting programs as talk show, education programs concerning issues such as peace building, democracy, gender, etc., music, and so forth.

It is not a 24-hour radio and therefore, though its daily schedule has to be fixed, it should, however, depend on people’s demands according to which it will be set up. For example, in the morning it will ‘On-Air’ for three hours from 8.00 to 11.00 am, while in the afternoon it will be for two hours from 2.00 to 4.00 pm and from 7.00 to 12.00 pm in the night.

- ✓ 'Off-Air' is a non-regular program aims at bringing people in Poso from different ethnicities and religions together through various recreational activities such as sports: soccer, badminton, volley ball, etc., chess tournament, tug-of-war, and many others.

F. Who will finance it?

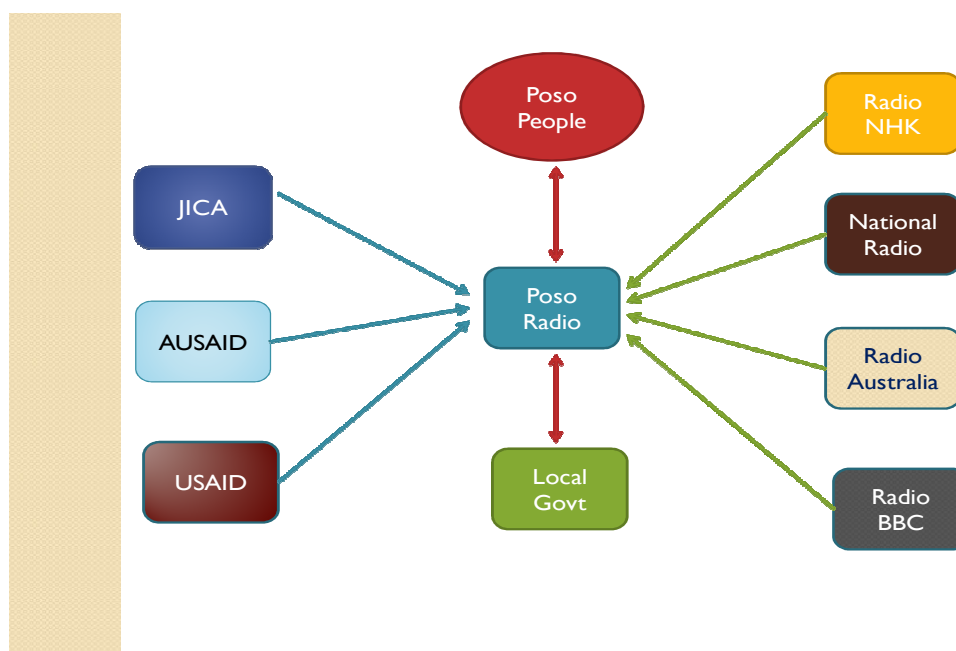
A proposal will be sent to various both national and international donors to set up the community radio. For assistance in providing radio materials such as education program in CD format, it will ask national radio, BBC, Radio Australia, NHK, Voice of America etc. to take part. Though it builds network with the local government, it will, however, maintain its status of independence.

G. How it will sustain?

In order for 'On-Air' activities to sustain it will request donors to provide a place for the community radio to operate and to lobby the local government to exempt its monthly electricity bill.

As for 'Off-Air' activities, it will invite sponsors to provide either material non-material assistance for the success of certain events such as soccer tournament, fun bike ride, etc.

Figure III. Relations between Poso Community Radio and Other Institutions



The above figure shows that it is possible for the Poso community radio to send its project proposals to such donors as JICA, AUSAID, USAID, etc. that can provide financial assistance. Other donors include Radio NHK, Radio BBC, Indonesian National Radio, Radio Australia are also considered to providing the community radio with assistance related to radio materials. The Poso people are the most important stakeholder of the community radio in a sense that the radio cannot survive without their support.

H. How it can achieve its goal to promote reconciliation?

As many as 20 radio announcers will be recruited and provided with radio training so that they have minimum required skills to deal with ‘On-Air’ activities such as hosting talk show, reading news, ability to operate the radio mixer, etc.

In various programs, basically all people, be they laymen, local bureaucrats, religious leaders, community leaders, etc. in Poso have the right to participate in the talk show program to express their point of view on certain issues. The radio management will arrange the talk show topics and the speakers to be invited. Example of Issue to put forward: ‘How to work side by side to do housing reconstruction?’, and many other constructive issues.

As for 'Off-Air' programs such as promoting recreational activities, it is arguably the best way to create the atmosphere of togetherness in the region which in the long run will effectively reconstruct the mutual trust among people from various ethnicities and religions.

V. Conclusion

As Suharto stepped down in May 1998, Indonesia was about to become a failed state, being weakened by many protracted conflicts throughout the country. Poso was among the region which suffered from the terrible impact of Muslim versus Christian war. Indonesian central government seemed to fail to deal with the conflict. Although the central government pioneered some peace agreements, including the most remarkable one, Malino Declaration, the conflict was still far from being resolved. The central government, along with national and foreign NGOs also provided material assistance to the IDPs and victims of Poso conflict. However, in accordance with the concept of a long term peace building effort and in response to apply the concept of positive peace, this material assistance is considered not enough to bring about a long lasting reconciliation process. Accordingly, as an alternative model of a long term peace building effort, the author suggested the concept of community radio that works for and by the people of Poso. This community radio can also function as an alternative model toward reconciliation in other post-conflict areas. It aims to create peaceful atmosphere through its various 'On-Air' and 'Off-Air' programs. Last but not least, Rome was not built in a day. It takes time, even perhaps a long period of time for such kind of programs to take effect.

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