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Family planning, reproductive rights and public policy during the reform era in Indonesia

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Abstract

The “New Era” of reform and democratization in Indonesia ushered in by the downfall of President Suharto has brought about significant changes in the way public policy is formulated and implemented. The Government’s commitment to family planning has waned, however, while other areas of population policy remain unattended or are ignored altogether. Policymakers are not realistically addressing demographic issues in Indonesia today, and this inattention is arguably undermining the nation’s development efforts. The linkages between population and development were apparently better understood and utilized by policymakers during Suharto’s New Order regime.

This paper is an initial attempt to clarify the main political, intellectual, institutional and developmental dimensions of this problem, and to reflect on its possible causes and consequences. The 2002-2003 Indonesia Demographic and Health Survey, among other sources, is used to update our understanding of current demographic trends. A variety of official sources are used to describe the current policy environment for population and family planning. Interviews with policymakers are used to uncover a range of underlying and competing “policy narratives,” and to help understand the forces responsible for the widening gap between population issues and policies. The paper closes with some recommendations for closing the gap.

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