

Indonesia

GEOGRAPHY

Indonesia is a nation of over 17,000 islands (about 5,000 of them inhabited) sprawled across the equator. The landscape includes rugged volcanic mountains covered with rainforests, coastal mangroves and coral reefs. The climate is mostly hot and humid, though it's slightly cooler in the mountains, with monsoonal winds causing two seasons – a wet from November to April and a dry from May to October.

PEOPLE

About 60 percent of Indonesia's 226.1 million people live on Java. Java is the island with the most fertile soil though only seven percent of the nation's total land mass. The capital, Jakarta, is in Java. Other regions such as Kalimantan and Papua are only sparsely populated.

Indonesians have a mainly Malay heritage but there are many ethnic groups, and over 300 languages with Bahasa Indonesia being the national language.

More than 80 percent of the people are Muslims, about 10 percent are Christians, and there are minorities of Hindus, Buddhists, and animists. The government's official philosophy of Pancasila aims to unify the people. Pancasila's Five Principles are: belief in one god, humanitarianism, nationalism, democracy and social justice.

HISTORY

For thousands of years, people have farmed, fished and traded on Indonesia's islands. Around the first century AD, Hindu and Buddhist beliefs came to the region from India. Thirteenth century traders introduced Islam, which spread quickly and widely.



Being carted by oxen is sometimes the only way to travel over a rice paddy field.



Map courtesy of The General Libraries The University of Texas at Austin

In the 1600s the Dutch came to Indonesia and colonised the area, naming it the Dutch East Indies. Over the next 300 years, various groups tried to regain independence. Early in the 20th century, some Western-educated Indonesians took up the cause of forming a new nation.

In 1942, the Dutch rule was finally broken by the Japanese, who moved in to occupy most of the islands. In 1945, following the World War II surrender of the Japanese, Indonesian leaders declared independence. Sukarno became president of the new republic and held power despite Dutch efforts to regain it.

Following a failed coup attempt in 1965, General Suharto became Indonesia's second president. He remained in power for three decades of dramatic growth, but an economic crisis in Asia led to riots and protests, and eventually to Suharto's resignation in 1999.

Indonesia has seen great change in recent years, including the fall of Suharto after 32 years as president; the first free elections since the 1960s; the loss of East Timor; independence demands from provinces; much ethnic and religious conflict and the 2004 tsunami that left more than 220,000 Indonesians dead or missing.

ECONOMY

Indonesia is rich in natural resources – oil, gas, coal, minerals, timber and rubber. Recently, the government has reduced its income dependence on oil and gas by encouraging investment in agriculture, forestry and manufacturing.

More than half of Indonesia's workforce are employed in agriculture, as small farmers or labourers on large estates. Farm products include rice, rubber, coffee, spices, palm oil, banana and cassava. Unfortunately, many workers have lost their jobs to machines, and farmland is being taken over by industry and housing. Indonesia is generally self-sufficient in rice, but remains subject to drought and other environmental problems that have been linked to uncontrolled logging and rainforest burning.

Another one-third of the workforce is in the service sector, and more than 10 percent are in manufacturing. Most factory workers receive very low wages and work in difficult conditions. Many of these workers are women and children.

In Indonesia, millions struggle to survive by street trading, making goods at home, or scavenging for scrap items.

LIVING CONDITIONS

Two-thirds of Indonesians live in rural areas. In Java, rice fields cover the flat land and the terraced hillsides. Timber houses with tiled roofs nestle among palm and fruit trees along the roads. Other homes include walled family compounds (in Bali), communal longhouses (in parts of Kalimantan), and houses on stilts. Many villages do not have electricity connected – these villages are also often subject to seasonal flooding.

Cities like Jakarta are growing rapidly, as people move away from rural areas to find work. The growth is so fast that all over the city, people live in crowded neighbourhoods lacking facilities like waste disposal.

Rice is the staple food across Indonesia - fish, meat, vegetables and fruit are also eaten, but in smaller quantities. Poor families eat cheap, filling foods like cassava and rice, which by themselves lack important nutrients.



A little girl taking her lessons seriously.

Comparatively speaking...

CATEGORY	INDONESIA	AUSTRALIA
Population	226.1 million	20.3 million
Urban population (as % of total)	48.1%	88.2%
GDP per capita (PPP US\$)	\$3,843	\$31,794
Population living on less than \$2 a day (PPP US\$)	52.4%	0%
Population with sustainable access to an improved water source	77%	100%
Adult literacy rate (% age 15 and above)	90.4%	99%
Net primary enrolment ratio	96%	97%
Life expectancy at birth	69.7 years	80.9 years
Under-five mortality rate (per 1000 live births)	36	6
One year olds fully immunised against measles (%)	72%	94%
Adults living with HIV and AIDS (% age 15-49)	0.1%	0.1%

Source: United Nations Development Programme. 2007, *Human Development Report 2007*, Oxford University Press, New York.

Although Indonesians are healthier now than in the past, serious diseases persist, including malaria, diarrhoea, tuberculosis and other respiratory illnesses. Many families do not have a safe water supply, and only half have adequate sanitation.

EDUCATION

Due to a sustained focus on education, most adults can read and write. However poor families find it hard to pay schooling costs, and many children miss school. There are limited job choices. With an estimated 40 million Indonesians now living in poverty, the nation needs renewed vision to undertake the task of reconstruction.

WORLD VISION AUSTRALIA IN INDONESIA

World Vision Australia's Indonesian operational areas are in Java, NTT (Rote, Sumba and East Flores), North Maluku, Papua and Aceh. Most of our development programs are child sponsorship based with some grant funding, including AusAID-ANCP grants.

Our areas of work include:

- Health (TB, HIV and AIDS, malaria, nutrition, maternal and child health, water/sanitation);
- Education (basic education, early childhood education);
- Livelihood (economic development, food security);
- Community Resilience (peace building, community-based disaster mitigation).

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