

Aceh Conflict Monitoring Update

1st – 31st May 2006

World Bank/DSF



As part of an analytical support program to the peace process, the Conflict and Community Development Program, within the World Bank Office Indonesia, is using a newspaper conflict mapping methodology to record and categorize all incidents of conflict in Aceh as reported in two provincial newspapers (Serambi and Aceh Kita). The Program publishes monthly updates and analysis of the data, complemented by fieldwork where possible, in both English and Indonesian.¹

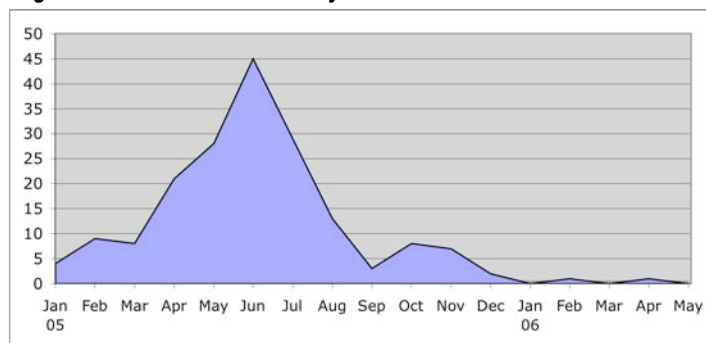
No conflict incidents between GAM and the GoI occurred in May. However, one previously unreported incident occurred at the end of April when a GAM combatant was hospitalised for gunshot wounds inflicted by a Brimob patrol boat. Reports of an AMM DiCoSA meeting in Aceh Utara indicate that such forums continue to provide a useful space for dealing with a broad range of cases and issues, including community-police tensions, incidents between GAM and security personnel, theft involving former GAM, and confusion surrounding reintegration assistance. While these incidents are relatively minor and unlikely to disrupt the peace process, their resolution is important for they can simmer, breed unrest, and, potentially, lead to future conflict. As AMM's withdrawal in mid-September approaches, it is important that the Government, BRA, Forum Bersama, and AMM think through how DiCOSAs (or equivalent forums) can be maintained.

There was a slight decrease in local level conflicts to 78 incidents in May; tsunami aid-related incidents were also stable with 14 reported. Perhaps the most significant recent shift in the dynamics of local level conflict is the dramatic increase in demonstrations. Since the beginning of this year, the number has leapt from one or two to approximately 17 a month. That the vast majority of these demonstrations are civil society groups protesting against the government, points toward a governance deficit. This suggests that national and international post-tsunami and post-conflict assistance must, in the long-term, aim to build transparent and accountable institutions capable of governing Aceh and delivering the windfalls of decentralization and increased autonomy.

No GAM-GoI-related conflict incidents were reported in May, but one reported in April

No conflict incidents between GAM and the GoI occurred in May. However, one previously unreported incident occurred at the end of April.

Figure 1: GAM-GoI incidents by month



¹ There are limitations to using newspapers to map conflict: newspapers, for more information see: Patrick Barron and Joanne Sharpe (2005). "Counting Conflict: Using Newspaper Reports to Understand Violence in Indonesia", *Indonesian Social Development Paper No. 7*. Jakarta: World Bank. This report, as well as the monthly monitoring updates, are available online at: www.conflictanddevelopment.org. The dataset is available for those interested, please contact Samuel Clark at: sclark@wboj.or.id

On 6th May, Serambi reported that a GAM combatant was hospitalised for gunshot wounds inflicted by a Brimob patrol boat on 30th April. The incident took place off the shore of Langsa in east Aceh when a patrol boat from North Sumatra clashed with a boat being tested by the victim and six friends. The head of the local KPA office in for the Pereulak region, Tengku Usman, confirmed that a former TNA member (combatant) was involved and that the matter had been reported to the district police. The district head of police was reportedly unaware that the incident had involved a former GAM member. There were no subsequent reports regarding this incident, suggesting the matter was sufficiently resolved between those the two parties.

District AMM offices currently handling a mix of cases and issues

Reports of the Aceh Utara's DiCoSA meeting on the 16 May, coupled with last month's report on the Mini-DiCoSA initiative, indicate that Aceh Monitoring Mission (AMM) are currently dealing with a range of cases and issues.² A report by Aceh Kita and interviews with local AMM staff indicate that five matters were addressed:

1. The beating of six citizens by Brimob stationed at ExxonMobil

In last month's Update we reported tense relations between villagers and police in Kecamatan Indra Makmur, Aceh Utara. Similarly, this month tensions broke-out in Kecamatan Nibong, also in Aceh Utara, after Brimob personnel beat six villagers. This second incident took place on 1st May in Menje Lhee village, near where Brimob guards the nearby ExxonMobil gas production plant. In response to this incident, villagers from three villages held a mass demonstration to demand that the post be moved. At the DiCoSA meeting, GAM and the police agreed that the police would investigate the matter and that criminal prosecutions would continue.

2. Theft at a sawmill reportedly carried out by former GAM

The second matter to be considered was the accusation that former GAM members were responsible for theft from a sawmill in Kecamatan Cot Girek. Reportedly the Police were aware of the incident but were reluctant to act without first coordinating with GAM so as not ruin local trust and relations. At the DiCoSA, it was agreed that GAM would investigate in order to determine who was responsible and that, simultaneously, the police would also carry-out an investigation.

3. The circulation of a pamphlet slandering a local GAM leader

Also discussed was the distribution of a propaganda pamphlet that slandered a local GAM figure in Kecamatan Nisam in Aceh Utara. Nisam continues to experience significant tensions between former GAM and those previously involved with anti-separatist groups. It is unclear who was responsible, but this could be indication of the types strategies employed in the lead up to the elections.

4. The beating of two TNI members

At the end of April, former GAM members beat two TNI members.³ The incident took place in Kandang village, Lhokseumawe, a little more than one kilometre from AMM's Aceh Utara office. Field interviews indicate that initially GAM was reluctant to identify those responsible and hand them over to the Police. Further, there was some tension as to whether the TNI could on the basis of their intelligence instigate an investigation or whether it should be left for the police. At the DiCoSA meeting, AMM requested that GAM cooperate so as to allow the police to make arrests and let the matter be handled by the law.

² In order to bolster dispute resolution and create space for dialogue, the district AMM office in Aceh Utara (and Lhokseumawe) has taken the initiative to establish what they call "mini DiCoSA" forums at the *kecamatan* (sub-district) level. Since September last year 51 mini DiCoSA have been held in Aceh Utara. Generally, they are only held in response to local problems, but the AMM encourages that all parties meet fortnightly regardless so as to maintain dialogue and relationships.

³ This second GAM-GoI incident for April is not included in our dataset (i.e. Figure 1 above), for it was not reported by either of our two newspapers sources, Aceh Kita or Serambi.

5. Mass demonstrations organized by SIRA

The issue of mass demonstrations organized in Aceh Utara and Lhokseumawe, as well as where, were also discussed. These demonstrations are viewed suspiciously by the TNI and are a source of distrust. The DiCoSA discussion helped to reassure security personnel that GAM is not actively involved in SIRA activities.

In addition, reintegration and reintegration assistance was discussed more generally. As reported last month, there are significant and increasing misunderstandings over when reintegration assistance will be provided and what form it will take. Not being directly involved in the provision of assistance, and having not been involved in the design of reintegration programs, AMM could do little but assure GAM and the public that the government was committed to providing some form of assistance. Such generic statements can do little to ease tensions on the ground.

While the incidents discussed are relatively minor and unlikely to directly disrupt the peace process, their resolution is important. These types of incidents, if left unresolved, are likely to simmer, breed unrest, and, potentially, lead to future conflict and disputes. While the DiCOSAs are proving to be effective in some areas, it is unclear how they will continue after AMM's withdrawal in mid-September. It is important that the Government, BRA, Forum Bersama, and AMM think through how the DiCOSAs (or equivalent forums) can be maintained after AMM leaves.

Two armed youths are arrested by KPA

An interesting incident in Aceh Utara was reported in Aceh Kita, where KPA members arrested two armed youths. The two youth were reportedly using the FN type pistols to steal *sawit* (palm oil) from villagers in Kecamatan Cot Girek. As a sign of warm relations with local police and of civic reintegration, GAM handed over the youth to the district police. They were quoted as saying, "KAP does not possess the authority to process them. Rather, it is the role of the police as law officers [to process such incidents]."

Local level conflict remains high

There was a slight decrease in local level conflicts to 78 incidents in May (see Figure 2). In contrast, the number of violent local conflict incidents increased by one to nine incidents for May – still relatively low (see Figure 3). Similarly, the number of tsunami aid-related incidents increased slightly to 14 incidents.

Figure 2: GAM-Gol and Local level conflict by month

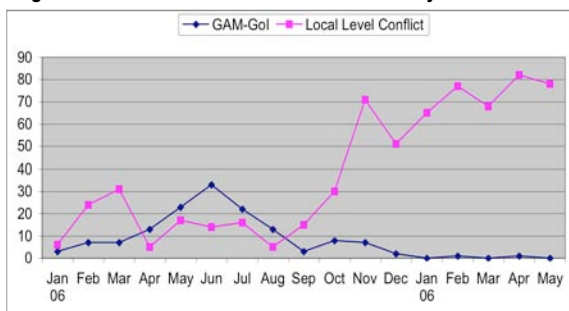
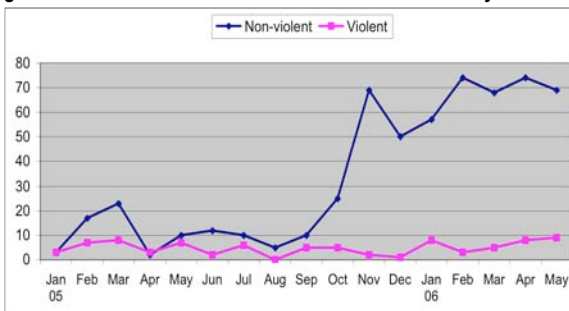


Figure 3: Non-violent and violent local level conflict by month

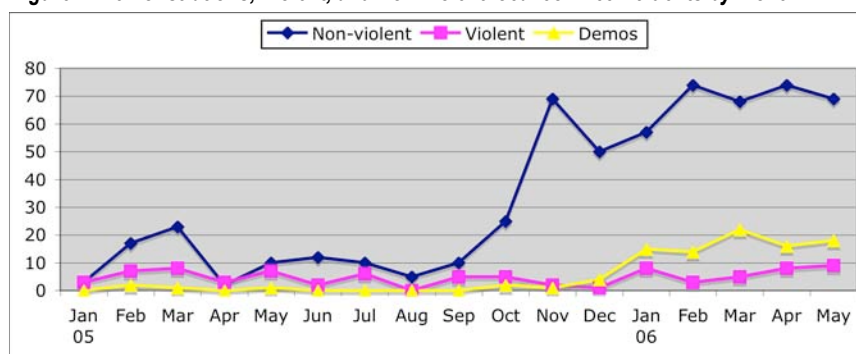


Significant increases in demonstrations since the beginning of 2006

Perhaps the most significant shift in the dynamics of local level conflict since the beginning of the year is the dramatic increase in demonstrations. Figure 4 indicates that for 2005 the average number of demonstrations was less than one a month, but that, starting in January, the number has leapt to an average of 17 a month. The vast majority of these demonstrations are civil society

groups protesting against the government. In May, for example, 14 (78%) were directed towards the government, one was aimed at an aid organization, one a civil society group and, two “other” actors.

Figure 4: Demonstrations, Violent, and Non-violent local conflict incidents by month

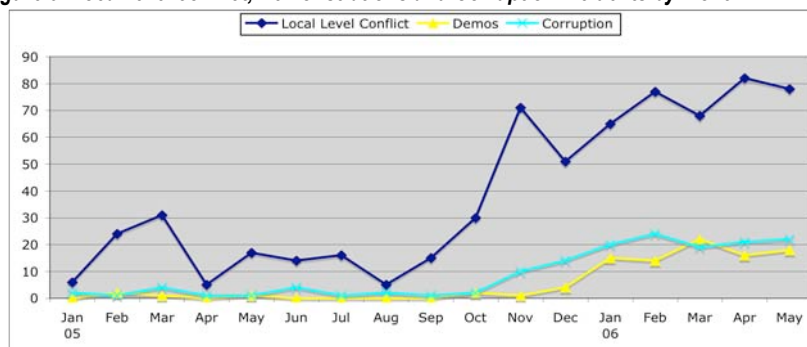


This significant rise can probably be explained by a combination of two factors: increasing space for debate and protest, and increasing dissatisfaction with government performance. As discussed in previous Updates, we (partly) contribute the rise in local level conflict to the opening of socio-political space created by the resolution of the vertical GAM-GoI conflict.⁴ Similarly, the rise in demonstrations could be a result of a more active civil society emboldened by the more open political climate. However, the three-month lag between the dramatic post-MoU rise in administrative conflicts, which are also primarily directed towards the government, would seem to suggest that communities are also increasingly dissatisfied with government performance. Indeed, many of the specific issues being protested in May are the same as those reported in previous disputes. This suggests that these issues are not being addressed and indicates that local conflict can escalate if not satisfactorily resolved.

Corruption incidents also on the rise

A similar upward trend can be seen in the number of incidents involving corruption or accusations of corruption.⁵ Figure 5 indicates that the number of corruption incidents has steadily risen from close to zero between January and October (2005) to approximately 20 a month in 2006. Interestingly, very few of the incidents that result in demonstrations are also reported as being related to corruption. This would seem to suggest that corruption is not (yet) an issue that civil society has begun protesting with public demonstrations.

Figure 5: Local level conflict, Demonstrations and Corruption incidents by month



⁴ See, for example, the October and November (2005) Conflict Monitoring Updates, available at: www.conflictanddevelopment.org.

⁵ The complexity of corruption incidents makes it very difficult, from newspaper reports alone, to distinguish between actual and accusations of corruption. For this reason, the dataset does not attempt to distinguish between and, instead, follow what is reported by the newspapers.

Tree Power! Three separate villages protest bad roads by planting trees in the middle

In three separate incidents from different corners of Aceh, villagers protested bad roads by planting trees, or by threatening to plant them, in the middle of the road. In Simpang Bahgie village, Kecamatan Bandar, Bener Meriah, villagers planted more than 20 banana and tuber trees in a road that the community claims the government has not maintained in 15 years. On Weh island off the coast of Banda Aceh, villagers from Kreung Raya, Kecamatan Sukakarya have begun planting various types of trees in the middle of the road that leads from the city of Sabang to KM 0. This case has been the subject of numerous complaints and protests recently, as the Government has issued a contract for construction that a private contractor has failed to fulfil. Finally, in Manggeng, Aceh Barat Daya, villages threatened to plant a road with rice if the government did not immediately repair a road that they have promised to on numerous occasions.

As with the rise in demonstrations noted above, these acts of civil disobedience are indicative of common Acehnese's increasing dissatisfaction with local government. Coupled with increasing incidents involving accusations of corruption, these trends point towards a medium- to long-term challenge for Aceh: governance. Due to the presence of conflict, government departments in Aceh have, in some respects, been shielded from community and civil society demands for accountability and transparency. Indeed, the conflict made it very difficult for the government to effectively function in many areas. Thus although rebuilding in tsunami areas, facilitating the reintegration of GAM returnees, and assisting those communities affected by the communities are important short to medium-term goals, international and national support must also support the building of institutions capable of managing Aceh and delivering the windfalls of decentralization and increased autonomy in a transparent and accountable way.