PART 2

Education—Securing Youth Futures?
Introduction to Part 2

Education has been highlighted by successive Indonesian governments as the key to national development and a pathway out of poverty, and school completion rates in Indonesia seem good. The nation is regarded as on track to meet its 2015 target (which reflects the Millennium Development Goals [MDG]) of universal primary education, and is well on the way to reaching the goal of 9 years compulsory education. The AII survey of high school students (Nilan et al this volume) found that, overall, they embraced education as the best way to secure their future and their transition to adulthood.

However, the education system is poor, and the decentralization of educational management post-2001 has not had the desired effect of improving the quality of education, in regard to infrastructure, teacher quality, or lessening teacher absenteeism. Lack of equality is still a problem, as students in rural areas and those from poor families have fewer opportunities, and hence the school system still perpetuates class differences.

The two chapters in this section address education and transitions to adulthood in two very different communities: rural Java and a mining town in the interior of Sulawesi. In both cases, young people must travel to urban centers to further their education. White and Margiyatin emphasize that de-agrarianization in Java (where it has been especially marked) means there are few jobs in rural areas and so young people need to go to cities to find work. Schooling, coupled with the influence of mass media, has transformed rural youth in Java into people ready for urban, industrial work.

However, the unemployment rate in Indonesia is high among its youth (around 30 per cent), and especially high for university graduates. Youth who have migrated for education face difficulties finding work when they return home, even though there has been an “inflation” of educational prerequisites for many jobs: a junior high school certificate is no longer sufficient for factory employment, for example. Many of the chapters in this book record the disappointment of educated youth at the difficulties they face in finding employment after years of struggle and sacrifice by themselves and their parents.

The extreme case of de-agrarianization is illustrated by the youth of the well-established mining town of Sorowako (Robinson), where industrial development was predicated on the destruction of the agricultural economy. For many young people from the town, “the good life” means being able to return home to work for the mining company and live near their families in their ancestral territories. They have done the self-fashioning necessary to transition