



Educating Indonesia's Christians

By Kim Pettit

Indonesia is the world's fourth most populous country. It has 235 million people. Statistics based on the government's 2000 census say religious affiliations are: Muslim, 86.1 percent; Protestant, 5.7 percent; Roman Catholic, 3 percent; Hindu 1.8 percent; other or unspecified, 3.4 percent.

While Christians in Indonesia are officially said to comprise only about 9 percent of the country's population, some organizations, such as OMF International [<http://www.omf.org/>], believe that the Christian population has increased and may be closer to 15 percent of the population. Even so, missionaries are not allowed to operate freely in Indonesia. Those who do choose to do mission work must support themselves through other means.

No matter what measure you use, "lack of Bible knowledge is a problem within the Christian church," says Ishak Wonohadidjojo, director of Indonesia's Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) <http://www.acsi.or.id/programs.php>. Wonohadidjojo explains that in Charismatic and Pentecostal churches, training for church workers, including pastors, ranges between no formal training to eight months' worth, with the average being six months. In Evangelical denominations, such as the Chinese immigrant churches or Presbyterian churches, pastors usually have a B.A. seminary-level education.

"People think Sunday school is only for children, not for youth or adults," he adds. "When children enter the seventh grade, they are considered youth and no longer participate in Sunday school of any kind. It is hard to recruit teachers. Few churches offer training for teachers. Also, each Christian group has its own curriculum and there is little overlap between denominations."

Through the Association of Christian Schools International, Wonohadidjojo serves many believers who are obtaining their Christian education at school—not just at church.

ACSI's Ministry

The Association of Christian Schools (ACSI) <http://www.acsi.or.id/programs.php> in Indonesia is a membership organization with 130 Christian schools with an enrollment of 160,000 students. The average school has 600 students; but there are some member schools that are much larger. Grade level enrollment sizes can vary from school to school. Kindergarten could have 75 children at one school or 1,000 children at another.

"In the 1980s, the Christian community preached revival, but allowed 200 Christian schools to close, says Wonohadidjojo. "The tide changed in 1990 as those who were converted in the 1980s sought to educate their children in the faith, and Christian

school numbers have been increasing since then.”

ACSI publishes materials for students from kindergarten through 12th grade on all subjects, including math and science. Much of their material is translated curriculum. ACSI also publishes books for teachers, principals and parents.

Student handbooks are ACSI’s best-selling products, since these are only used once and generate repeat orders. Its print runs are between 3,000 to 6,000 units per title, depending on the edition. The books are usually priced at three times the cost of production, though sometimes they can go as high as four times that cost.

ACSI’s best-selling curriculum is a series on character building. Titles that are very Christian (i.e., with numerous references to Scripture, church-based examples, religious terminology) do not sell well to non-Christians. The curriculum has seven grade levels and materials for both teachers and students. ACSI plan to produce two versions: one for the Christian market, another for the general trade market. However, financial limitation delays the execution of this plan.

ACSI sells its books principally through events. Every year it holds an annual convention with four or five speakers. Some 300 to 500 people attend that event. Each month, ACSI holds regular training events at its headquarters; 30 to 50 people attend these sessions. Twice a year, in three major cities around the country, ACSI holds additional events, with an average attendance of 100 each.

“Indonesian teachers and educators,” says Wonohadidjojo, “prefer to participate in workshops. They prefer to have hands-on practical approaches and meet people face-to-face. They are not fond of reading. Therefore, to publicize books, it is better to hold a workshop to share the material within the book.”

Some ACSI materials are sold through Christian or church bookstores. Many sales are done to individual agents (colporteurs). ACSI does not sell its materials via the Web. Its site serves as a catalog, but money is exchanged through bank transfers only. ACSI currently has two showrooms run by volunteers at its principal offices. The organization hopes to open additional showrooms as more volunteers are recruited.

Other Christian publishers

There are a number of Christian publishing houses in Indonesia. Wonohadidjojo mentioned older publishing houses include Yayasan Siaran Kristen Indonesia (YASKI) <http://www.yaski.co.id/>, BPK Gunung Mulia <http://www.bpkgm.com/>, and the Christian and Missionary Alliance publisher, Kalam Hidup kalamhiduppusat@bdg.centrin.net.id. Newcomers, described by Wonohadidjojo as publishers who attended the 2007 International Christian Retail Show in Atlanta, include Charismatic publisher Metanoia <http://www.metanoiapublishing.com/>; Yayasan Betania Indonesia resmela_nila@yahoo.com; Gramedia [<http://www.gramedia.com/>, a general trade publisher that was founded by Catholics; Catholic publisher Kanisius Media <http://www.kanisiusmedia.com/>; ANDI <http://www.andipublisher.com/>, operating since 1980; *Bahana*, <http://www.bahana-magazine.com/> the Christian magazine in Indonesia with the largest circulation; and *Kairos*, a monthly whose CEO used to work at *Bahana*, and that is published by Gereja Kristen Indonesia synodgki@indo.net.id. Cook is aware of a number of other Christian publishers in Indonesia as well, including YKBK, the Bible Society of Indonesia, and others. However, their numbers are small compared to the rest of the publishing industry in the country. In September 2007, *The Jakarta Post*

<http://www.thejakartapost.com/> reported that the Indonesian Publishers Association (IKAPI) [<http://www.ikapi.org/new/>] has “756 members, but there are many more publishers who have not registered ... In Yogyakarta alone, there are hundreds of publishers, thousands of new titles and millions of books in print.”

Distribution challenges

Though publishers and bookstores in large cities are thriving, distribution is a challenge. Dessy Sekar Astina, a member of Forum Indonesia Membaca (Forum for Indonesian Reading) <http://indonesiamembaca.wordpress.com/>, a non-profit organization, told the *Jakarta Post* that “regardless of the quality or type of reading materials, they remain either unavailable or unaffordable in most of the country,” adding that “the general inaccessibility of books has prompted many individuals and organizations to open libraries.”

The *Post* also cites Ganda Purnama, of the Indonesian Book Workers Community: “Bookstores or even newspaper kiosks cannot be found everywhere, and they are mostly found in towns and other larger urban areas. It is the plain economic reality. Very few people can afford to buy books in rural areas.”

“I spend much of my time traveling,” says Wonohadidjojo, “visiting our member schools throughout the country. But, Indonesia is composed of 1,700 islands, and six of these are major ones. The postal system is not reliable, so other means must be found to get books and curriculum to customers.”

And for Christian books, sales channels for Christian titles are limited. Non-Christian bookstores are unwilling to carry Christian books.

“Evangelism is not welcomed by the majority Muslim population,” says

Wonohadidjojo. “Traditionally, there is religious tolerance and respect for one another’s beliefs. In practice, people sometimes discriminate. It depends on the area or community where they live. “The revival of Muslim literature is a challenge to Christians in Indonesia,” he adds. “Muslim publishers are flooding the market. Their titles are not academic but are geared to professionals; this market is growing. But Christian publishers in Indonesia rely on translations. They do not look to the Church as a source for new acquisitions and do not develop local authors.”

Wonohadidjojo contends that there is a lack of training for editors and designers. Therefore, in 2006, I supported some friends here to get connected with an International expert. That’s all!) working with *Bahana* magazine, sponsored workshops with Carol and John Dettoni, Christian educators in the U.S. who founded Chrysalis Ministries <http://chrysalisministries.typepad.com/>. The trainings, on how to develop Christian writers and how to do creative design, were held in different cities in Indonesia and were “very well attended.”

Wonohadidjojo says more training is needed on editorial management, pre-printing processes, the use of financial instruments, and sales and marketing. In May 2008, ACSI is offering training [http://www.docstoc.com/docs/document-preview.aspx?doc_id=422199] on business management, fundraising and development in Surabaya and Jakarta.

As a publisher who is also an educator, Wonohadidjojo is well aware of the impact that such training can have to equip Christian publishers and the Indonesian Church.

“Training helps us grow,” says Wonohadidjojo. “Indonesian Christians need better Christian education over their entire lifespan. It is not just for children, but

for youth and adults as well. Spiritual formation should continue through adulthood,” he adds.

And the Bible agrees. God calls each into ministry—including publishing—“to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up

until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:12-13).

© 2008 [David C. Cook Global Mission](#). First printed in *Cook Partners*, March, 2008.

ChristianTrade Association International

PO Box 62187 • Colorado Springs, CO 80962-2187 USA

TEL +1 719 432 8428 • FAX +1 719 325 7001 • info@ChristianTrade.com • www.ChristianTrade.com