



Transformative Roles of NGOs in Advancing Indigenous Social Justice through Participatory and Culturally Embedded Strategies in Indonesia

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Article Info

Article History:

Received February 06, 2024

Revised February 27, 2024

Accepted March 13, 2024

Keywords:

Ngos, Social Justice, Indigenous Communities, Participatory Management.

Abstract

This is a qualitative study that examines the role played by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the quest of social justice among the indigenous people in Indonesia. Through interviewing the NGO practitioners and indigenous leaders in different regions, the research establishes some of the most vital roles such as legal advocacy role, cultural preservation role, and taking the indigenous views to the making of a public policy. The discussions reiterate that sustainability requires long-term, culturally respectful partnerships as well as absolute opposition against donor-induced and short-term cycle of projects. As far as the managerial analysis is concerned, the work criticizes traditional models of operationalizing NGOs and proposes more relational, participatory and adaptive frameworks. Instead, NGOs are perfectly placed as an agent of indigenous agency and self-determination so that they do not merely operate externally as outsiders. In its turn, the study will contribute to the field of non-profit management research since it describes social justice as a continuous, contextual process instead of seeking it out as a quantitative result. It also provides pragmatic information to the practitioners as well as to the scholars who are interested in redefining the NGO practice to respond to the community-determined objectives and justice systems.

Introduction

The archipelagic country, Indonesia with its impressive cultural plurality includes over 1,300 ethnic groups among which over 50 groups must be evaluated as indigenous ones. Such groups are often found in geographically distant provinces like Kalimantan, Papua, Sulawesi and some areas in Sumatra where they have over the years continued to be marginalized in terms of economic accessibility, political involvement and legal enfranchisement. Despite a formal acceptance of the indigenous rights on the level of instruments such as the Indonesian Constitution and the following decisions of the Constitutional Court (MK35/2012), the implementation of these rights is quite selective and limited in scope (Fahmi & Armia, 2022). Superseding, structural inequities, namely in the realm of land ownership and possession, cultural liberty and politics, demonstrate deeper forms of disproportion engraved in the Indonesian developmental strategy (Fahmi, 2024).

Traditionally, the voices of the native people have been excluded in decision making arenas creating systematic disenfranchisement. The centralized forms of governance, which were finely integrated under New Order regime, prioritized the state-oriented growth and large-scale extractive capital to the detriment of community-rooted rights and sustainability (Lust, 2022). This arrangement proved disastrous to the native people because the traditional lands of

customary land were re-categorized as a state-owned forest to enable its takeover and commercialization by corporations. The result of further conflicts, ecological frustrations, and culture loss have attracted the civil society groups particular non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which are becoming mediators between injustices, exclusion, and indigenous sovereignty (Khan et al., 2022).

In the current state of Indonesia, NGOs are agents operating in the social and environmental justice field as the key players. In the provision of services in places where the state is nowhere to be found, these entities also serve the purpose as political bodies where they organize opposition, spread the legal awareness and enhance the society in terms of power (O'Grady & Shaw, 2023). They have mainly been condensed with a broader democratization agenda that at least on paper has struggled to produce equal results among the indigenous people (Carpenter, 2023). Thus, NGOs are often found trying to fill the gap between lack of state presence that can enforce the removal and the strength of customary communities when trying to ground root movements directed towards land restitution, cultural conservation, and access to basic amenities (Wyse & Das, 2024).

NGO role in social justice of indigenous people in Indonesia is a complex, dynamic and highly contextual affair. The social justice that is outlined here is not merely a matter of redistribution of materials, but it would entail the recognition of cultures, participatory equality, and sustainability of the ecology (Van, 2022). NGOs utilize various tactics to promote these goals, such as legal action to protect territorial claims, collective mapping of indigenous lands, mediation between an indigenous community and the government officials, and indigenous-led education and media. To give an example of AMAN (Indigenous Peoples Alliance of the Archipelago), this coalition has played a central role in establishing massive local advocacy and in demanding structural changes at national and local governance (Beukes & De Visser, 2021).

Despite the fact that NGO interventions have often been valorized within the academic circles, several observers consider these actions to have been over-hyped. The critiques list the following issues: NGOs have the potential to reproduce paternalistic power relationships, strengthen donor interests and crowd out local agency (Rusfiana & Kurniasih, 2024). Short-term fragmented funding, lack of grassroots accountability and laws that were based on formal rights and not the lived experiences had in some situations limited the operations of the NGO. These observations create a need to recognize this with greater subtlety on how NGOs can balance the tensions which run between advocacy and implementation, external influence and local ownership, as well as discourses of abstract rights and socio-political realities on the ground.

NGOs have played an important role of intermediaries in policy especially in the Indonesian context of decentralization in which local government has gained greater autonomy leading to disparate capacities and accountability (Ferrazzi, 2022). In turn, this makes their labor contributions not only essential but disputable, at least where indigenous groups struggle against potent forces like mining, agribusiness, and macro infrastructure development. Solidarity and the matching goals are not the only factors that mediated the relationships between NGOs and indigenous communities because historical mistrust, constant cultural negotiation, and political changes interfere with the relations between all parties.

In the current study, the researcher will analyze how NGOs facilitate social justice of Indigenous people in Indonesia. It uses qualitative information supplied by the members of the communities, the NGO workers, and local stakeholders instead of providing a generalized evaluation to explore how NGOs have mediated structural inequalities, how they have supported indigenous agency, and promoted rights-based development. The compelling nature

of this attention is based on the fact that, social justice, in the context of the Indigenous groups, cannot be actualized by focusing on legal change or even recognition by the state, as the reality emerges through relationships, strategies, and perceptions that are lived through the interaction of the community and the NGOs of the society (Giacomini, 2022). NGOs in the highly differentiated and stratified context of Indonesia where colonial legacies merge with modern capitalisms and cultural resilience legal pluralism, can hardly be discussed only as influential phenomena but as the processes of operation they are engaged in and the role they as agents have to play.

Method

Research Design

The current research was based on a qualitative descriptive-interpretive design, which is the methodological approach that can be sincerely aligned with attempts to explore the multidimensional and situational nature of NGO participation in the promotion of social justice among indigenous groups in Indonesia. Qualitative inquiry was considered imperative towards the grasping of nuances of social processes, relational dynamics, and the meaning people create out of lives. The current investigation was directed, unlike in a hypothesis-testing study or in a quantitative study of a causal relationship type, toward the discovery of the worldview and experiences of NGO professionals, on the one hand, and the indigenous community members, on the other. In the context of an interpretive approach, the researcher approached local realities critically through the attention to meaning-making processes, and those were embedded in concrete circumstances of indigenous communities.

Research Sites and Context

This research was conducted on three areas in Indonesia namely; Kalimantan, Papua, and Sulawesi, in which, the indigenous advocacy by NGOs is active and established. The choice of such locations was purposive as it was driven by strong indigenous communities as well as long-established partnerships with non-governmental organizations interested in land rights, protection of their culture, and lobbies. Each site contains unique socio-political and environmental dynamic that allows a presumably diverse but similar enough set of contexts in which to make an evaluation of the performance of these NGOs. The local organizations like Wahi, Safe, and regional advocacy networks offered entry points (giving entrances to certain communities and key informants).

Participants and Sampling Techniques

The population of the research was 24 persons chosen through purposive and snowball sampling methods. The first iteration of cohort consisted of practitioners working in NGOs to advocate indigenous rights, leaders of indigenous communities, and locally relevant facilitators who serve as go-betweens among state authorities and Indigenous people. The members of this sample were selected because they were actively involved in advocacy, and most of them knew the history and current struggle of social justice in their communities. Following the initial set of interviews, snowball was used, which resulted in more partners in the study suggested by previous interviewees whose experience or life experiences were perceived to be purposive to the research. Ten NGO practitioners were sampled as well as eleven indigenous community members and three local government stakeholders in the end. At this stage, saturation was reached, so it was clear that there were no new themes revealed with the following interviews, allowing the depth and credibility of the produced data.

Data Collection Methods

The collection of data was based on in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant observation and documentary analysis. A combination of the approaches in a strategic manner was used to conduct triangulation on methods and sources. The main field strategy was semi-structured interviews that provided the freedom of exploring the views of the participants and, at the same time, it possible to present the repetitive themes systematically in the foreground such themes were the advocacy strategies, the impact on the community and the perception of justice. The interviews were done in Bahasa Indonesia/ local languages guided by the interpreters when necessary; the duration of the interview was between 45 and 90 minutes. At the same time, such methods as participant observation were applied at community conferences, NGO trainings, and land-mapping. This ethnographic element has provided the researcher with the potential experience of the situation, the interactions, and patterns of behavior as well as the dynamics of a community and has added context to the dataset. In complementing these field methods was the systemic analysis of organizational reports, advocacy publications, legal aid materials and community declarations. Such readings provided social context, individual backgrounds, the history of NGO participation and became the source of data interpretation of interview, observation field notes.

Data Analysis

A procedure that is described was employed to code the data with the thematic analysis: familiarizing with data, initial code, development of themes, reviewing of theme and interpreting it. Manual inductive process was used through data coding based on patterns and categories which appeared with no expectation of the researcher. After finishing this initial work-up stage, codes that were perceived to have similar conceptual contexts were grouped into broad categories that could accommodate the major aspects of the NGOs roles, specifically, legal empowerment, cultural preservation, participatory governance, and structural challenges.

Result and Discussion

Indigenous people in the archipelago have traditionally been systematically locked out of policy regimes put in place by the state, are not only deprived of use rights to customary land, but are also seldom represented in formal politics. The NGOs have in turn become key intermediaries and have often been the balancers between the state apparatus and the needs at the community level. Their portfolios include portfolios on legal empowerment, participatory development activities, cultural preservation programmes or policies and advocacy. Their influence, albeit, is contingent and uneven and is dictated by the local contexts and organizational strategies and the degree of involvement into the community discussion. In this vein, a sophisticated picture would demand the abandonment of simple assessments and look at the underlying mechanisms involved in how NGOs approach Indigenous actors and make justice occur. The level of implementation of this research is introduced in the following pages and classified according to the major themes uncovered in the field information as well as the highlights of both strategic actions and perceptions of the consequences of NGO intervention in the Indigenous setting.

NGO Engagement Approaches

The current study is a contribution to the body of empirical knowledge on the topic of NGO? Indigenous relations in Indonesia as it defines strategies of engagement that characterize successful organizations that act in indigenous territories. The three inter-related dimensions

that hold these strategies in place are contextualized awareness, depth of relations and community-centered planning. These values have further been incorporated overtime by the practitioners as a reaction to the fact that the indigenous populations have been historically marginalized, one way of building and sustaining trust within the ethnic and participatory practice has been systematically perpetrated.

The long-term presence of the organization is a major attribute of effective practice. Instead of simply operating by means of short-term projects, competent NGOs bind themselves to multi-year contact and, consequently, integrate themselves within the local life and will not be recognized as some persons who come and go but instead are viewed as confident, known partners. This kind of commitment enables the transformation of relationships that are based on solidarity as opposed to purely transactional provision of services.

Another convincing aspect is the development of trust by being culturally sensitive and abiding by the local guidelines. Those organizations that acknowledge and respect the prevailing norms, e.g. consult local elders on customary matters, use of local languages and involve them in local rituals are easily accepted and absorbed into the customary ways. This is contrary to acceptance by agencies that dictate agencies and obviously ignore or customary snub institutions thus meet a lot of opposition or do not get to participate in full.

In the current case, it can be determined that participatory planning is one of the fundamental aspects of NGO strategy in Indigenous settings. Unlike the imposing external models of development, NGOs work together with the local communities using consultative processes whereby the community members are directly involved in the determination of their priorities and the formation of the project goals. These inclusive arrangements boost legitimacy and make sure that programmers are made in compliance with locally authorized requirements either in land rights, cultural education or access to legal personality. Creating the collective ownership of projects, NGOs empower the Indigenous and reduce the level of dependence on foreign actors.

Moreover, direct intervention is not the way NGOs practice their involvement as capacity building and facilitation are brought to the fore. NGOs provide with the tools and the opportunity of learning that gives the ability to the Indigenous collectives to claim their rights independently. These take the form of legal literacy education, participatory mapping as part of customary land claims as well as documentation training and organizational development support. NGOs play a transformative role by passing knowledge and skills to the local actors in an effort to support long-term autonomy and institutional robustness.

Contextual responsiveness and flexibility are also the features of NGO approach. NGOs adapt to local conditions which include the socio-cultural, political and environmental situations within the Indigenous communities, with different regions having diversified influences. Instead of basing the practice on the standardized templates, successful NGOs observe more iterative and adaptive practices that change according to community feedbacks and priorities. This flexibility allows them to work effectively even in evolving situations such as conflict-affected or displaced or climatic pressure environment situations.

Overall, the study proves that meaningful NGO interaction with Indigenous communities in Indonesia depends not only upon technical capability or financial resources but on ethical relationships, inclusion and a long-term commitment to justice based on Indigenous worldview. All of these approaches complement each other and form a basis of a wider approach that can promote social justice and Indigenous self-determination.

Strategies to Promote Social Justice

The field data approach of Indonesia demonstrates that NGOs use a flexible and multiple-pronged set of strategies to promote social justice to Indigenous communities. It does not mean that all these strategies are similar; this is because they are different depending on the structural inequities, legal settings, and social-cultural realities of communities. The results were centered on five strategic elements of dominance namely legal empowerment, participatory mapping, cultural revitalization, facilitation of multi-stakeholder dialogue and community-based service provisions. One of the well-known NGO interventions is legal empowerment. In a bid to inform and educate on Indigenous rights as stipulated under national and international legal agreements, organizations teach and educate on the rights covered by national and international law such as the Indonesian Constitutional Court Decision No. 35/2012 and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP). By conducting training on law, workshops and community talks, there is creation of awareness of constitutional protections, land tenure rights and even avenues of justice. NGOs also help the communities in preparing legal records and land claims with proper administrative and judicial procedures especially relating to state land re-classification and corporate intrusion.

Another main strategy is participatory mapping. GIS and participatory mapping practices involve the communities to collect spatial data on land practices as well as customary land tenure practices by the NGOs. Through this, they enable interaction between communities and the state on terms of official land recognition. Third strategic area is cultural revitalization. NGOs take part in teaching and maintaining indigenous languages, practices, and knowledge systems which are often conducted during cultural workshops, documentation efforts and (traditional) arts initiatives. A fourth domain is based on the community provision of services. The NGOs provide various kinds of services which include health, education, and infra-structural to Indigenous peoples who happen to have less accessibility to state facilities. Lastly, NGOs provide a multi-stakeholder dialogue whereby community members engage in deliberations with the government and the privates' sectors, and other stakeholders to find a common ground on matters and find solutions to the problems at hand.

As a whole, the above strategy areas portray the fact that NGOs in Indonesia operate using context-sensitive strategies aimed at resolving structural inequity, legal vulnerability, as well as, socio-cultural marginalization. Participatory mapping is an important approach of recording the ancestral lands and cultural sites among the indigenous peoples. NGOs assist the gathering of geospatial information, historical accounts and traditional boundary data through mutual interaction with local inhabitants in the area. The correspondingly produced community-generated maps serve as a political and legal tool challenging the issued concessions by the state and strengthening the customary claims. Using these maps, claims of customary rights to land are regularly placed before regional and national governments in a bid to compel them to take heed of provisions. The mapping process also facilitates cohesion at the internal community level as well as the intergenerational knowledge transfer, which works

towards spatial justice informed by local epistemologies. Cultural rights constitute one of the major lines on the basis of which NGOs promote social justice. NGOs prioritize needs other than symbolic justice, and they concern themselves with mandates of resistance to assimilation and marginalization by promoting such activities as recording of oral histories, revival of traditional rituals, intergenerational knowledge workshops, and production of new learning materials in the indigenous languages. Such attempts enhance cultural identity and pride, which allows communities to declare their uniqueness and bargain their status in the wider social and political context.

Another strategic practice entails the creation of a dialogue between the indigenous peoples and outsiders, as well as the government, business enterprises, and the general populace. NGOs work as representatives who help indigenous peoples to raise their issues during formal meetings, and in front of the hearings. Their activities include organizing policy dialogues, roundtable discussions and advocacy campaigns that are meant to bring the local grievances into policy reform. By means of these avenues, the NGOs increase the transparency and validity of the native right, foster a participatory form of government and diminishes the information barrier which usually hinders efficacious negotiation with state actors.

Where there is negligible or no provision of public services NGOs are normally expected to take up the responsibility of providing the basic services with regard to social justice. These services include community health, indigenous-controlled school facilities, legal assistance facilities and environmental conservation. Although every NGO does not necessarily involve itself directly with service delivery, the ones that do so regard the practice as an efficient tool at addressing significant gaps on one hand, and establishing self-sustaining communities on the other hand. The participatory processes are conducted to develop these services which are also provided in form that relates to the local traditions of customs and the system of governance in order to make them accessible and culturally meaningful.

One emerging approach among NGOs includes the systematic integration of the principles of intersectionality in the designing of programs, especially, by putting an emphasis on the rights, presence of women, youth, and persons with disabilities in indigenous contexts. With their attention shifted to the specific activities that promote the voices of disadvantaged groups in local communities, NGOs have come to realize that the idea of social justice becomes impossible without combating intra-community disparities. Some of the aspects in which NGOs practice inclusivity in their extended advocacy is through leadership development programs, gender justice workshops, as well as youth forums.

Community Perceptions and Impact

A study conducted in different parts of Indonesia shows that indigenous populations, as a whole, consider NGOs as very important in pursuit of their justice, recognition, and autonomy. However, attitudes towards them are based on the level of NGO engagement, similarity between NGO strategies and local ideals and the level of empowerment as opposed to dependency that the communities feel. In turn, NGO involvement has an integrated effect across many dimensions, legal, social, cultural and psychological, which has a material and symbolic manifestation.

The most widely mentioned implication of NGO involvement is the further credence by outside parties, i.e., the government agencies and the population. Societies observed that the activities of NGOs raise awareness about their plights in the country in terms of policy formulation and reportage. The participatory mapping process with legal advocacy organized by NGOs allows communities to make their claims to land official and exercise rights in state institutions which in turn increases a perception of such institutions as legitimate. Although it is not full compensation, it is a big milestone in the process of acquiring sovereignty of their ancestral territories and resources.

The NGO activities also consolidate the collective identity and the cultural pride. Community projects include cultural documentation, indigenous education programs, and heritage preservation movement which stimulates revitalization of knowledge systems, and cultural continuity in place. These initiatives strengthen internal cohesion, especially in those cases in which cultural identity is eroded because of displacement, assimilation demands, or by generational division. Resurrection of traditional culture and native speech is viewed as a significant symbolic win that supports more general struggle of justice beyond legal recognition.

Even among the modern texts that deal with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) activities in marginalized communities, the community members always mention the idea of empowerment as the key effect of the interventions of the movement. This empowerment cannot be reduced to the gain of legal consciousness; it also comprises the extended possibility of dealing with state institutions and to invade the communal rights. Capacity-building programs implemented by NGOs with an end goal of increasing both personal and collective agency the most significant of them being leadership trainings, legal literacy classes, and media advocacy workshops. The communities report that they are in a much better position to discuss their interests, bargain with development actors outside their community as well as take charge of development processes that are influencing their lives.

The second, no less interesting finding touches upon the improved access to the basic rights and services. Interventions by NGOs in some of these localities enable their access to civil documentation, delivery services, environmental rehabilitation initiatives, as well as alternative education programmers meant to support the needs of indigenous people. They are not by any means blanket solutions, but all the same they are thought of in the face of neglect shown by the state and they are appreciated more especially in the remote areas where there are no other formal institutions or may be inaccessible. Their transmission via culture-specific channels also contributes to the Improvement of community acceptance and participation.

It is also known that the emergence of NGOs affects the local power relations, which has both positive and problematic aspects. On the positive end, the participation of NGOs allows communities to confront the hegemony of the extractive industries and local political elites which often overlook the claims of indigenous people. Meanwhile, there appear conflicts within because resources are distributed and leadership roles are debated. In some circumstances, the very rise of local leaders educated with NGO programmers creates either generational or political rivalry to the older customs leaders. On the one hand these tensions do not inevitably reduce the overall community support towards the NGOs but on the other hand they bring up the necessity of NGOs being cautious not to be insensitive to the internal life of governance.

The existence of NGO activities in marginalized settings in Indonesia has received favorable perceptions largely; however, sustainability of activities is a common issue that has to be addressed. The respondents expressed gratitude on NGOs that show sustained presence and partnership style, but they showed distrust of organizations that seem short-lived, as well as those ones that engage in short-term projects supported by external grants. The perceived authenticity and long-term commitment of an NGO was sometimes given more importance than the scale of intervention. The communities emphasized the importance of relationships and building them, developing the local leadership, establishing self-reliance as opposed to dependency, which is what yields a lasting impact. The results support the emerging body of opinion that rather than define the role of non-governmental organizations in terms of instrumental service- and law-provision, it has to be studied as part of the organizational behavior, stakeholder management, and institutional embeddedness. In the insides of the management sciences, especially its development sector and non-profitable material management, NGOs have been criticized to be taking an ambivalent position among global directives and local demands (Kafi, 2021). By focusing on the neoliberal facets of the phenomenon of NGOs and the use of reductive binary coding of entities as saviors or proxies of neoliberal development, the given research also tries to overcome this frame and lay bare the imbedded agency of NGOs as both organizational subjects of negotiation of legitimacy and relational capital and institutional innovation in fighting the social injustice of Indonesian indigenous communities.

The real-life data complicates the classical images of NGO efficiency and impact that are based on the measurable indicators and the top-down strategic reasoning (Mulder, 2023; Ahtesham, 2024). Performance in aboriginal environments occurs on a transaction's basis, as opposed to relationally. The result is re-scaling of "effectiveness" in the choice of NGO ability to negotiate hybrid structures of accountability in which legality and whenever donors carry no legitimacy but rather depends on cultural compatibility and previous acceptance with local communities (Kutay, 2021). This confirms the early claim made by Mawdsley & Somaya (2021) that relational embeddedness is the long-term successful art in the development work, not only in delivery of the output. Organizational wise, this makes NGOs maintain a permeable management structure which can answer the relational modes of power, oral ways of knowing, and community-based resource management rationalities, which are beyond bureaucratic rationality (Sledge, 2024).

Moreover, the work presents an important correction to the debate that concerns NGOs as the messengers of the so-called social value within the sphere of marginalization (Klinger et al., 2023). Although most of the literature on social entrepreneurship and NGO management imagines value creation as a process of social innovation or impact expansion (Spanuth & Urbano, 2024), the study reveals that in indigenous territories, value creation is likely to be non-linear, symbolically charged and culturally embedded. Social fairness, as it is, is an unquantifiable item but the reality to be lived within the view of the affected populaces with respect to respect, independence and the facility to talked about and be heard. This lends credence to the recent post-development critique (Gudynas, 2021) that deems a decolonial rethinking of NGO activity to be based on the relations ethics of accompaniment instead of intervention. Management studies have tended to pursue an organizational neutrality thesis; however, this research confirms that NGOs are themselves political players, and are composed of and are composed of and in turn contribute to contested institutional fields (Onyoni, 2022).

Land mapping, legal assistance, and advocacy training do not technically facilitate land mapping, legal aid, and advocacy training; they are strategic intrusions into power and power asymmetries that have characterized the relationships between indigenous peoples, state bureaucracies, and extractive industries (Kidder, 2022). NGOs are not just boundary spanners in the form of influencing the environment of indigenous people and their rights; NGOs can be defined as those organizations that can be regarded as institutional entrepreneurs according to Hatch et al. (2022) since they are disruptive, interpretive, and reconstruction of the normative environment. They are effective, thus, not only in the services delivery but also in the reorganization of the architecture of recognition and institutional legitimacy (Keegan & Meijerink, 2023).

Nevertheless, it is also in this paper that we encounter one of the major criticisms of NGOs: NGOs are capable of spawning a structural change, but may themselves result in a vicious dependency relationship and internal division, when engagement strategies are excessively projectized, or not participatory enough. This confirms previous cautions of the Igboization of grass-roots struggles whereby survival of organizations cease to be associated with community priorities. The management implication here is that NGOs should no longer focus on the client-service logics, but should rather adopt the capacity-building paradigms which focus on leadership transfer, continuity between generations, and the institutionalization at the grassroots level (Ijjasz et al., 2024). The fact that in this study internal tensions in communities on account of NGO directed leadership training is created strengthens their view that leadership models in indigenous settings need to be mindful of culturally specific models of governance and the precarious balance of customs legitimacy.

The other important implication is associated with the time orientation of NGO projects. Short-term periods dictated by the donors tend to be out of sync with long-term temporalities of indigenous struggles that occur through historical dispossession and multi-generational resilience. Communities under investigation attach more importance to the presence of the NGO, which is quantified in terms of a relational commitment and a historical loyalty instead of the projects being completed. This underscores the poor quality of time-specific performance measures which are the essence of the present NGO management evaluation systems. Any given effort to design the organization in those contexts should pursue adaptive management principles that incorporate the elements of flexibility, learning-through-iteration, and collaboration planning with the indigenous actors over time.

At the governance level, NGO activity in the indigenous regions should not just be downward accountable, but also collaborate to co-produce governance arrangements with the community institutions (Larson et al., 2022). The conclusions of this study are in line with those urging to re-consider the design of NGO governing structures in which placing traditional authorities, youth councils and women groups as co-strategists stand in relation to passive beneficiaries. Practically, it might mean that NGOs have to move to decentralized decision making, a polycentric form of governance (Chew, 2024), and deliberation processes sensitive to indigenous cosmologies and power structures.

Further, the present study challenges the concept of capacity as applied to indigenous peoples to the management scholars to question such notion (Salmon et al., 2023). Instead of perceiving them as having a deficit of capacity with regard to bureaucratic rule or market preparedness (as in most development diagnostics), NGOs should understand that there is the existent richness

albeit different institutional process, resource framework and knowledge. The Indigenous peoples have types of resilience, resource-sharing and consensus governance which defies the presumptions of top to bottom management theory and rational planning. To exert their roles as inefficient intermediaries of justice, NGOs are required to heavily consider an epistemic humility characterized by indigenous knowledge systems anchored at the center as opposed to a subsidiary.

Conclusion

The paper has highlighted the imperativeness of NGOs as the institutional agents that pierce through multifaceted socio-political landscapes as they seek to attain social justice to indigenous societies in Indonesia. In addition to provision of services, NGOs are relational and culturally embedded organizations that continuously have to negotiate legitimacy, institutional constraints and changing power relations. The results indicate that the long-term relations built on participatory governance, epistemic humility, and organizational flexibility should be viewed as the new paradigm of NGO access in indigenous settings based on ridding themselves of short-term projects in favor of long-term commitments. Conventional management theories based on rational planning and linear assessment systems are hardly the right tools to set in motion the values of fluid, symbolic and culture-specific notions about justice held dear by indigenous communities. This requires managerially a rethinking of the strategy, performance measurement and governance in NGOs. The results of social justice should be measured using the community-determined indicators, and the system of accountability has to include the formal systems, as well as the local culture authorities. At a deeper level, NGOs need to become transformative actors (actors, who do not merely question the exclusions of the state and market but who also focus attention on indigenous agency and knowledge). In so doing, the NGOs not only serve their mandates but they also play significant roles in achieving a general rebuilding of justice which is inclusive, lasting and that is culturally acceptable. These lessons add to the emerging literature on management, which focuses on ethics, equity and localization in non-profit governance.

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