

From indigenous people's rights to natural resources management: questions of sustainability, livelihoods improvement and equity

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Abstract

The importance of indigenous knowledge, as well as the needs to better recognize the rights of indigenous peoples in managing their areas and natural resources has been widely recognised. It is often assumed that better recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples would automatically lead to more effective management of natural resources and livelihoods improvement. However such efforts have often led to the exact opposite of what was originally intended and have resulted in resource overexploitation, inequity and dependency on external interventions. Based on our field observations and experience in Indonesia, this paper describes the causes of the failure, e.g. misleading interpretation of important terms ('participation' and 'local people'), imbalanced views between rights and responsibilities, and weak conceptual knowledge and practical skills of the project implementers. This paper also outlines key factors that should be included when promoting the rights of indigenous peoples, as well as specific knowledge and skills needed by project personnel.

Background

The importance of indigenous knowledge and the need to better recognize indigenous peoples' rights to manage their lands and natural resources has been widely reported and promoted. Traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) has contributed to conservation of biodiversity, endemic or rare species and their habitat, maintenance of ecological processes and sustainable resource use⁴. Different approaches at international and national level have been developed to promote the indigenous peoples' rights⁵.

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4 Gadgil et al. (1993), Alcorn (1993), Berkes (2007)

5 At the international level for examples are the Indigenous Peoples' and Community Conserved Areas and Territories (ICCAs), Community Based Forest Management (CBFM) and Community Based Conservation (CBC). Throughout this article, we use the term community based natural resources management (CBNRM) to represent various CBFM, CBC, HKm, HTR, HD and other community based programs.

In Indonesia, the rights of indigenous peoples are acknowledged under constitution and law⁶, and there are also civil society movements, NGOs and indigenous organisations supporting indigenous peoples' empowerment, e.g. the Alliance of the Indigenous Peoples of the Archipelago (AMAN). However sustainable management of natural resources, equity and livelihoods in the country have not improved as expected. Rather, instances of resource overexploitation, inequity, conflict, and dependency to external intervention have occurred. Some scholars⁷ also report similar cases in other countries.

Based on a literature reviews, direct observations and long experience in Indonesia⁸, this paper qualitatively describes the causes of the failure, outlines key elements that should be included, and discusses the specific knowledge and skills set needed by project personnel to link rights recognition with livelihoods improvement, equity and sustainable forest management.

Causes of failure

Scholars have identified the following causes: (a) the inability of conservation and development organizations both to control and guide the behavior of complex organizations⁹ and to understand and properly deal with complex systems which are multidimensional, multiple scales, of multiple ownership and involve high degree of uncertainty¹⁰; (b) lack of accountable local leadership and institutions¹¹; and (c) a wide interpretation (or naive application) of complex contextual concepts of participation, social capital and empowerment¹².

In addition to the above, we found the following interacting technical factors have contributed to the failure:

- Key actors (project managers, field facilitators, government, donors) rarely learn lessons from past projects, and new projects keep repeating the same mistakes. Project reports rarely include lessons of failures and their causes. Or if reports are available, either they are unpublished, or published as journal articles in English. Most of local NGOs and government staff in Indonesia have difficulty using foreign languages; and due to the nature of their work, must fulfil tasks following predetermined logframes and schedule, therefore lack time to learn and improve.

6 The indigenous peoples' rights in Indonesia is acknowledged for examples through the 1945 Constitution article 18b, and Law no. 5/1994 on the Ratification of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity article 8 and 15. However there are some regulations and ministerial decrees that negate the existence of the indigenous people, e.g. Law no. 41/1999 on forestry and Forestry Ministerial Decree no. 31/Kpts-II/2001 on the implementation of community forestry (Sumardjani, 2007).

7 Kellert et al. 2000, Mansuri and Rao 2004

8 Our study and experiences described in this paper were mostly drawn from the following research projects: (1) Adaptive Collaborative Management in Jambi; (2) Governance of Danau Sentarum National Park; (3) Saving Remaining Orangutan Population within and around Danau Sentarum; (4) Forest Governance Learning Group in Indonesia.

9 Kellert et al. 2000

10 Berkes 2004

11 Soemarno 2010

12 Mansuri and Rao 2004, Pretty and Smith 2004

- Many programs and projects use participatory approaches only to gather information (passive, consultative and bought participation¹³) or to form groups to meet predetermined objectives (functional participation), rather than to strengthen local leaderships and institutions (interactive participation) and to build capacity for self-mobilization.
- Workshops and training are rarely designed based on learning theories, principles and techniques. Workshops often become a forum for indigenous people to complain, talk about problems or blame other parties, and in the worst case plead for independence.
- Efforts to promote indigenous peoples' rights often assume that (a) the indigenous group is homogenous and united, and (b) there is strong local leadership and institutions. In fact, indigenous peoples and communities are often heterogenous and have different interests. Many local elites are not concerned with social responsibilities, and customary rights are seen and treated as individual rights rather than communal¹⁴. Local people's views about forest and land might also have changed¹⁵, triggered by commercialization, consumerism and inappropriate decentralization.
- Gaps between the central government (Ministry of Forestry/MoF¹⁶) and field staff are also problematic. While MoF acknowledges local people's rights, field staff still apply exclusionary, top-down approaches and fail to respect local peoples' rights, resulting in conflict between the people and the government, and resistance of the local people who were at the outset highly supportive of conservation.
- Projects/initiatives/movements focus too much on effort on fixing policies at local and national level, and lack balance regarding what works on the ground e.g. participatory identification of the livelihoods assets and how to optimize their values. It is important to work on policies, however it is a lengthy process and policy-making in Indonesia is strongly influenced by political and economic agenda: a balancing act is needed.

Keys to success

The prerequisites for CBNRM to work include learning, building social capital, creativity, innovation, resilience, and strengthening local leadership and institutions¹⁷. In addition, we suggest the following keys to success:

- The existence of strong local leadership and institutions, that have a clear vision aiming at the improvement of village members' livelihoods, gender equity and sustainability of the natural resources¹⁸.

¹³ Participation of local people in programs and projects can be categorized into six distinct types of participation: passive, consultative, bought, functional, interactive, and self-mobilization (Pretty and Smith 2004).

¹⁴ Moeliono and Yuliani 2009

¹⁵ Basuki et al. 2011

¹⁶ In particular the Directorate General of Forest Protection and Nature Conservation/PHKA

¹⁷ Berkes (2004) and Pretty and Smith (2004)

- Before designing and starting intervention to promote equity, the external actors should carefully analyse the local situation including heterogeneity within the indigenous group, their interests, roles, rights, responsibilities and capacity, as well as dynamics and relations among them.
- Prioritize activities to build self-confidence and positive images about indigenous peoples' livelihoods assets (human, social, natural, physical and financial capital), in parallel with development of common vision, mutual trust, solidarity and unity among community members, as well as self-motivation and self-organizing capacity.
- Discussions, workshops and meetings should be designed to share successful experiences and important lessons rather than focus exclusively on problems. For this to happen:
 - External facilitators should possess good facilitation skills and be able to pose the right key affirmative questions
 - Outsiders (scientists, researchers) should pay sufficient attention to identify the people's livelihoods assets, and avoid too much focus on analysing problems without adequately identifying opportunities and solutions. They should share relevant external knowledge in a modest way, aimed to trigger learning rather than giving directions, and avoid paternalistic attitudes.
- Anticipate that indigenous peoples' vision, aspirations and plans for the future could be different from the project's target, therefore project managers and facilitators need to be flexible, tactful and creative. Allow for communities' aspirations and planned actions to extend beyond the project's focus.
- Prepare an exit strategy at the start of projects to avoid creating local dependency, e.g., by identifying community members who have an interest in bringing positive change to their society and environment, then building their capacity and knowledge to become a good facilitator and allowing them to take the lead once they are ready.

Conclusion

This paper, which presents the results of a country-wide observation of the effectiveness of CBNRM approaches in Indonesia, has described the limitations to current movements/approaches/programs, while also outlining the factors that have contributed to their success. We believe that it is essential for the organizations/facilitators promoting the rights of the indigenous peoples to understand those limitations and the keys to

18 As opposed to the personal hidden agenda of many local elites. One of the unintended consequences of decentralization is fragmentation. Many local elites are attempting to become head of villages, subdistricts or districts, or member of district legislative body, e.g. by proposing new villages, subdistricts and districts. Establishment of new administrative status has intensified exploitation of forest resources (FWI/GFW, 2002) and often associated with conflict (Yasmi et al. 2009).

success, in order to contribute both to conservation and human wellbeing in this vast, and socially and ecologically diverse country. We also believe that those factors might be country-specific, therefore in other countries may need some adaptation following socio-economic, political, cultural and ecological context.

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