

UNCOVERING THE THEORY OF ACTION OF
AN INDONESIAN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AGENCY:
A CASE STUDY IN LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

A Thesis

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by

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ABSTRACT

Community development workers associated with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Indonesia, usually start their career without a distinct theory about their work. They often learn their trade, from their own experience. Unfortunately, this learning from experience has rarely been documented and studied, for the benefit of future generation of community development workers in those organizations.

This case study, conducted by the author on an organization which he has observed and in which he participated over a period of eight years (1981-1988), is an attempt to turn the tide. Using Argyris and Schön's theory of action approach, it attempted collaboratively with the organization's personnel, to reconstruct the organization's theory of action, both on the "espoused" level as well as in actual practice.

As a result of this retrospective case study, the organization concerned, Yayasan Pengembangan Masyarakat Desa Irian Jaya (the Irian Jaya Rural Community Development Foundation), now has some 'baseline' to understand its own actions and to plan ahead. The study also recommended further research in the interactive learning processes between Indonesian NGOs active in environmental field, one of them being the organization studied.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

George Junus Aditjondro, was born in Pekalongan, Central Java, Indonesia, on May 27, 1946. He spent his toddler years in Java and the Netherlands, his youth in Kalimantan and Sulawesi, and his journalistic career in Semarang, Central Java, and Jakarta.

His love for the outdoors drove him from big city journalism to join a Jakarta-based rural development institute, Sekretariat Bina Desa (INDHRRA) in 1979. After two years of intensive traveling, writing, and studying what Indonesian NGOs were doing in the broad and diverse field of rural development, he was awarded a one-year fellowship at Cornell University's Rural Sociology Department. In summer 1982, he returned to Indonesia, and spent 5-year years developing a brand-new community development agency in Irian Jaya, Indonesia's easternmost frontier province.

In August 1987, he obtained a second fellowship to return to Cornell and pursue his unfinished graduate studies of five years before. This time, however, he had to switch from Rural Sociology to Adult Education, which gave him the fortunate opportunity to reflect on what he and his friends had done in Irian Jaya. This case study, will hopefully help him to assist the flourishing NGO community in Indonesia to turn into powerful social movements to transform the society towards a better situation.

To

my dear wife, Bernadetta Esti Aditjondro,
and our beloved son, Enrico Suryo Aditjondro;
my mother, Eliana Aditjondro-Lovink,
and my beloved brothers, Faizal and Ismail;
my friends at YPMD Irian Jaya,
and all my beloved fellow NGO
development workers.

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This thesis would not be possible in the first place, had Prof. Ben Anderson, Prof. Milton Barnett, and Prof. J. Lin Compton not been able to get me out from the Irian Jaya "battlefield," to reflect on my past experience in this tranquil haven of knowledge. When the time came to think about an M.S. thesis topic, I had considered the possibility of doing a retrospective case study about the organization where in I had been involved, using all the documentary sources which I had taken along, or which I could ask my friends in Jayapura to send me.

However, Dr Anderson's challenge to uncover the theories in the heads of the Indonesian NGO practitioners, made me reorient my thesis proposal drastically. The course in interpretive research methods, offered by Dr Deborah Trumbull in Spring 1988, helped me to find the conceptual frameworks to use in this case study.

Still, the thesis would not have been possible, if YPMD Irian Jaya had not been interested in a collaborative reflection about its past and current achievements. Hence, I am grateful for the permission and support which the "gatekeepers," especially my former boss and colleague, August Rumansara, had given to me to do this research.

Besides YPMD Irian Jaya, due credit need to be given to my colleagues in the Indonesian Environmental Forum (WALHI) in Jakarta, the Asia Foundation's officials in Jakarta, Kupang, and

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