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Nongovernmental Organizations in the Design and Implementation of Social Forestry Programs in Indonesia: Interests, Power and Strategies

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ABSTRACT

Many social forestry projects have failed to produce expected outcomes. In many cases, they do not suit specific local contexts, problems, and needs because they only articulate the interests of powerful actors outside local communities. In this study, we examine how nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) affect social forestry implementation. In many cases, NGOs are characterized as benevolent actors, often claiming to represent voiceless groups, including poor local communities, in the social forestry context. We are specifically interested in analyzing the ways by which the studied NGOs have shaped the implementation of social forestry models in the forests managed by the state company of Perhutani. We focus on how the NGOs operate and their motivation and strategies nuanced around their power relations vis-à-vis the state company, how they have been shaped and readjusted. We found that due to competition for funding some of the analyzed NGOs were ably persuaded to alter their initial idealistic motivation of serving the best interests of local communities, while the others were simply motivated by financial self-gains from the resource-full state company. Even when the central government pushed the company to implement an innovative scheme, with greater rights and access granted to local communities, NGOs continued to favor the company's interest by successfully persuading locals to continue with the old social forestry scheme. The study findings enhance the growing literature on the diverse roles of NGOs as interest groups in forest/environmental policies beyond the old characterization.

KEYWORDS

Community forestry; Tenure reform; NGO; Interest group; Actors' interest; Indonesia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past four decades, social forestry or community forestry has been envisioned as a policy innovation to empower rural communities to benefit from forest resources (Fisher et al., 2018; Widyaningsih et al., 2022). Its core approach is centered around granting local people greater legal rights and access to manage and utilize forest resources (Anderson et al., 2015; Sahide et al., 2020). It also allows local practice integration in terms of forest rehabilitation and supports local livelihoods (Moeliono et al., 2017). Social forestry promotion has further gained traction among the waves of interest in forest management, devolution and decentralization. Various models/programs related to social forestry have been established and implemented. Social forestry models are estimated to encompass nearly a third of the world's forest resources (Gilmour, 2016).

However, experiences across the globe have pointed out that social forestry has partially achieved its comprehensive policy goals (Anderson et al., 2015; Essougong et al., 2019; Meijaard et al., 2020; Santika et al., 2019). Scientific inquiries have attempted to explain the phenomenon, with recent attention to the power relations of actors as

the explaining factor (Bastakoti & Davidsen, 2014; Bowler et al., 2012; Schusser et al., 2015; McDermott & Schreckenberg, 2009; McDougall et al., 2013; Resosudarmo et al., 2019; Maryudi et al., 2022). Analyzing cases from several countries, Schusser et al. (2015) found that social forestry outcomes are determined by the interests of a small number of people or actors outside rural communities. Powerful actors often manipulate strategies to implement social forestry for their self-gain (Krott et al., 2014; Ismariana et al., 2024). They include not only governmental actors but also nongovernmental actors, interest groups, and private sectors (Schusser et al., 2015; Hasnaoui & Krott, 2019; Sahide et al., 2020; Harada et al., 2022; Maryudi et al., 2022; Stanzel et al., 2022; Kusuma et al., 2023).

A body of scholarly literature has shown the key role of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the rapid growth of social forestry in many countries from advocating to implementing policies (Barnes & van Laerhoven, 2014; Barsimantov, 2010; Harada et al., 2022; Laraswati et al., 2022; Rahayu et al., 2023). In both science and praxis, NGOs are often regarded as benevolent actors, claiming to represent voiceless groups, including poor local communities, in the social forestry context (Barnes & van Laerhoven, 2014; Gupta & Koontz, 2019). However, literature has increasingly captured their diverse roles, even in contrast to their benevolent claims (Bryant, 2002; Barsimantov, 2010; Scherer et al., 2014; Ramdani & Lounela, 2020; Laraswati et al., 2022). We focus on this issue as a departure point for providing further comprehensive reflections on and deeper insights into the roles of NGOs in social forestry policy making and implementation.

In this paper, we describe social forestry implementation in Indonesia, whose government considers it as one of its development strategies, aimed at supporting visions of rural development and poverty reduction (Fisher et al., 2018). The current government has ambitiously pledged to implement the social forestry policy in 12.7 million hectares of the state's forests. It grants legal permits to local communities through a range of social forestry schemes (Maryudi et al., 2022). We specifically analyze the roles of NGOs in the implementation of the social forestry programs in the forests managed by the state forest company of Perhutani (thereafter referred to as Perhutani).

Social forestry in Perhutani's forests has been of high scientific interest. The company was created as an autonomous body with the primary task of generating profits from the forests. For decades, it has adopted an exclusionary policy – limiting access of local communities to forest resources, which was centered around colonial forestry models (Peluso, 1992). Nonetheless, since 2001 the company has implemented its own social forestry model, *Pengelolaan Hutan Bersama Masyarakat*/PHBM, which is a joint management centered around benefit sharing with local community groups (Sahide et al., 2020). Over the past few years, limitations of PHBM have been exposed (for instance see: Sahide et al., 2020). Hence, the central government had recently introduced an alternative scheme to be implemented in Perhutani's forest area. The new scheme, called *Izin Pemanfaatan Hutan Perhutanan Sosial* (IPHPS), is directly administered by the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (MoEF) instead of Perhutani. The permit-based IPHPS is considered by the government a much better alternative for locals because it offers local communities with more secure legal management and permit utilization (Ota, 2019; Ragandhi et al., 2021; Rahayu et al., 2023).

We are specifically interested in analyzing the ways by which the studied NGOs have shaped the implementation of social forestry models in Perhutani's forests. We focus on how the NGOs operate and their motivation and strategies nuanced around their power relations *vis-à-vis* the state company, how they have been shaped and

readjusted. Bringing the case from Ngawi District (see Section 3 for its significance), we found that due to competition for funding some of the analyzed NGOs were ably persuaded to alter their initial idealistic motivation of serving the best interests of local communities, while the others were simply motivated by financial self-gains from the resource-full state company. Before going into the details of the case, in the following section, we provide the theoretical lens on the diverse roles of NGOs as interest groups, how they shape and influence policymaking and implementation, and how they are affected by it.

2. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

2.1 NGOs as interest groups in social forestry

The presence of NGOs in policymaking and implementation in various political landscapes cannot be separated from the waves of globalization (Boli & Thomas, 1997). An NGO is often defined as an independent and nonprofit organization striving to produce public goals that governments have often been perceived to fail to serve (Banks et al., 2015; Martens, 2002). The “non” prefix is initially used to indicate that NGOs aim to distinguish their activities and approaches from those of governments (Laraswati et al., 2020; 2022). For example, NGOs put emphasis on participation, empowerment, and a bottom-up approach as opposed to governments’ top-down development strategies (Stirrat & Henkel, 1997). NGOs are also seen as development agents for pioneering local institutional changes (Agrawal, 2001). Overall, the “non” characterization clearly underlines that NGOs are unaffiliated with government institutions.

In the social forestry context, institutional change is said to be a key factor in facilitating the collective action of local communities for improved forest resource management (Ostrom, 2010; Barnes & van Laerhoven, 2014). In many cases, NGOs have initially sided themselves with local communities in pursuing greater rights and access to forest management. They have worked with local communities to implement specific social policy programs, facilitate local capacity building, and provide technical assistance and empowerment activities (Yadav et al., 2015; Torres-Rojo et al., 2019; Harada et al., 2022).

However, recent studies show the burgeoning empirical evidence that NGOs also act as interest groups moving beyond their apolitical characterization (Laraswati et al., 2020). Krott (2005) defines interests as action orientations, in terms of economic, political, social, moral, and cultural aspects, adhered to by actors to benefit from something. Literature shows NGOs are (and have always been) political in their demands/ interests, activities and functions (Mitlin et al., 2007). Krott (2005) further argues that in conflicting issues, actors might disguise their real interests. In social forestry, state-NGO-community relations have evolved across spatial and temporal contexts. Formally, NGOs may advocate community’s rights over forest resources or mediate state-community conflicts (Harada et al., 2022). Nonetheless, they might pursue self (financial) gains by channeling donor funding to work with local communities (Kurniasih et al., 2021). Some NGOs even transform themselves as quasi-government organizations to implement social forestry programs (Rahayu et al., 2020). For fruitful policy analysis, it is thus important to analyze their normative (formal) and informal interests (Maryudi & Fisher, 2018).

2.2 NGOs and power relations in social forestry

Power is the determining factor if actors, including NGOs, achieve their interests. It is conceptionalized in various ways. Influenced by the Weberian view, Krott et al. (2014: 36) argues that "power is directly linked to specific actors". They define power as a

social relationship in which an actor modifies the behavior of another actor without recognizing or admitting his/ her will. In the context of state-NGOs-community relationships, examples of such power are of abundance. For instance, in Indonesia, Rahayu et al. (2020) describe that the government forces NGOs follow specific rules and regulations when working with rural communities in its social forestry projects despite wider NGOs' opposition. Also in Indonesia, social forestry policies and rules are generally implemented nation-wide despite their misfit to specific local conditions and community demands (Sahide et al., 2020).

Using social forestry contexts, Krott et al. (2014) further operationalize their ACP-approach by proposing three elements of power that can be used by an actor to impose his/ her will over another actor, namely: coercion, incentives/ disincentives, and dominant information. The practice of coercion in social forestry projects is not uncommon. For instance, peasant farmers in Indonesia used mass-mobilizations in order to coerce their demand to plant seasonal crops in forestland managed by Perhutani (Maryudi et al., 2015). NGOs even exert political pressure on and steer governmental agencies (Cook et al., 2017). With regard to incentives, NGOs might use their technical expertise to persuade local communities to adopt specific social forestry strategies and approaches (Scheba & Mustalahti, 2015). Furthermore, NGOs often advocate traditional ecological knowledge as dominant information of community-environment synergies in the push for participatory forestry.

The ACP is indeed actor-oriented, but it does not completely rule out structural power, which is based on rules, discourses, or societal settings (Ungirwalu et al., 2025). Structural power is considered as a power source, which can be used to strengthen the actor's power (Krott et al., 2014). For instance, the rise and consolidate power of NGOs in the forest policy processes, including in social forestry context, cannot be separated from the emergence of democratic society following the fall of the authoritarian government regime at the end of 1990s. In this paper, we are also in the position that analyzing structural power is useful to better understand the power constellations within the analyzed social forestry programs, how they have been shaped, readjusted and reconfigured.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This research used the social forestry management by the Forest Management Unit (FMU) (*Kesatuan Pemangkuan Hutan*/KPH) Ngawi, a managerial arm of Perhutani at the local level, as a study case. The forest area of Ngawi is 55,918 ha, making up nearly half of the total administrative area of the Regency. Ngawi is a part of the teak-rich triangle of Ngawi-Madiun-Blora where Peluso's Rich Forests and Poor People was conducted. A total of 95 villages (making up 43% of total villages in Ngawi District) are located directly adjacent to or around Perhutani's forest areas, with most people working are peasant farmers. Ngawi itself is one of the poorest districts in the country's most populous Province of East Java. These factors suggest that Ngawi is making a good case for social forestry projects.

This research analyzed the roles of NGOs during the implementation of both Perhutani's PHBM and government's IPHPS (detailed difference between PHBM and IPHPS is discussed by Ragandhi et al. (2021) and Rahayu et al. (2022)). In Perhutani's PHBM, which has been implemented since 2001. All Perhutani's KPHs (including KPH Ngawi) are obliged by the central management to formally sign a partnership agreement with village-based institutions, locally called *Lembaga Masyarakat Desa Hutan* (LMDH), to jointly manage company forests located in villages. The agreement is formally based on shared responsibilities and benefits from forests. As regulated in the MoEF Regulation No. 39/2017, the government either recognizes the continuation of

PHBM-joint management (*Pengakuan dan Pelindungan Kemitraan Kehutanan*/Kulin KK) or introduces the aforementioned IPHPS. In the former, the management right over forests is maintained by Perhutani, whereas in the latter, it is to be annulled and is fully granted to local communities instead. In KPH Ngawi, 69 LMDHs exist, all of which have decided to continue the PHBM model as applied for formal recognition from the MoEF in the form of Kulin KK. As of April 2021, 37 Kulin KKs have been decreed by the Ministry.

Data collection was performed through document analyses, literature reviews, interviews with key informants, and participatory field observations. Documents collected include the Ministry's social forestry regulations, corporate reports produced by Perhutani, decrees and contracts related to PHBM and/or Kulin KK, and reports on program implementation. We specifically analyzed the prescribed rights and responsibilities for related stakeholders, principally local communities, in the analyzed social forestry projects. We followed the review phase with interviews with key informants, who are directedly involved and experienced in either PHBM or IPHPS social forestry phases. In identifying them, we employed a complete successive refereeing and contacting (snowball effects).

Between May 2019 and July 2021, we interviewed chair/key persons of NGOs involved in social forestry in Ngawi, Perhutani's managerial lines at the KPH office and the field (including those tasked with social forestry), the Ngawi Regent, the former Head and officers at the Regency Forest Service, officers of the Provincial Forest Service, and chairpersons and member farmers of LMDHs. Due to sensitive and highly politicized focal issues, we followed Maryudi and Fisher's (2020) approach of setting comfortable interview settings and initial positive questions before deep diving during interviews. We further triangulated the information (Denzin, 1970) from interviews with participatory observations (Bryman, 2016) of forest management operationalizations and NGO activities in the (social forestry) program familiarization to local communities in several villages.

4. RESULTS

4.1 NGOs by the end of the exclusionary forest management model

Much has been written on the powerful Perhutani with its exclusionary forest management style in administering and managing state forests, particularly during the authoritarian regime of New Order (Peluso, 1992; Peluso & Vandergeest, 2001; Lukas & Peluso, 2019; Andriyana & Hoegl, 2019). To accomplish its mandate of generating profits for the state, the company prevented local communities from accessing, using, and benefiting from forest resources nearly to the absolute terms. It was leveraged by an autonomous status stipulated in a special presidential regulation to coerce resource control. Such includes the authority to establish an armed forest police unit to ensure "forest security". Perhutani has also been supported by various government apparatus, such as local governments, police and military (Bakker & Moniaga, 2010). Most of the research interviewees confirmed the and strategic alliance between Perhutani and local governments, which they considered as possessing "authorities to control" the people, as of crucial for sustaining the exclusionary forest management style.

The limited access to forests was particularly visible in teak-rich regions, including Ngawi. The only access granted to local communities was the temporary use (usually two years) of post-harvest compartments for planting agricultural crops. By the early 1990s, local communities across regions demanded more access to the forests. In Ngawi and some neighboring regions, as most key informants mentioned, resistance to exclusionary policy was expressed into sporadic and organized illegal land occupation

for prolonged agricultural cropping and illegal tree cutting (of young and mature teak trees). As such, latent and open (physical) conflicts between KPH Ngawi and local communities were increasingly common.

Local communities' resistance against Perhutani in Ngawi mounted at the end of the 1990s when the turbulent political situation brought the centralistic regime to an end. Nationally, the new central government adopted decentralization policy by devolving significant authorities of several important sectors such as forestry and natural resource management to local governments, principally at the district level. In Ngawi, the surge in reform spirits across the nation also ignited forest communities to openly fight Perhutani and conducted massive illegal activities, principally raids of mature teak trees (Setiahadi, 2012; Susilowati, 2015). Several interviewees, including sources from Perhutani and local governmental agencies, posited that some of the illegal tree raids were organized. On the other hands, sources from communities the upsurge of "free expression" in the forests was due to the crystalized anger to what they called as injustice, as illegal activities by forest officials were common. In many parts of Java Island, including in Ngawi, state forests, in the regulatory framework called as *Hutan Negara*, are spoofed into "*negoro"* in the local language, which means "please cut." Specifically, in Ngawi, people also satirized "*hayyu ya qoyyum*," an Islamic prayer, into "*kayuku yo kayumu*," meaning "your tree/timber is also mine." During this volatile period, more than a fifth of the Ngawi forests (approx. 12 thousand ha) were destroyed and eventually classed as unproductive, 50% of which were barely vegetated and occupied by agricultural cropping by local people (Yuwono & Putro, 2008).

This period was also marked by the emergence of NGOs conducting capacity building and local community empowerment in Ngawi. Specifically, a newly established local NGO called Lesehan (*Lembaga Studi Ekosistem Hutan*) with support from donor agencies -which began to mushroom around the time, came to mediate local conflicts and aimed to restore the degraded forest ecosystem. This NGO worked in sub-FMU (BKPH) Bringin in four villages: Dampit, Kenongorejo, Suruh, and Bringin. At the time, the four villages were considered red zones with high-level illegal logging and intense social conflicts. Virtually all mature forests in sub-FMU were raided, pushing Perhutani to deploy armed police military forces. Physical clashes were marked by one casualty, and more than 100 local people were arrested (Lesehan, 2003). The NGO was keen to turn conflicts into mutual collaborations between Perhutani and the local communities. The general idea, as the NGO claimed, was to provide greater access (additional land spaces) to communities to conduct agricultural practices while involving them in the restoration of degraded forests. This idea fitted the interests of the local people. As mentioned by the chairperson of a farmer group, additional space for agricultural cropping was highly desired.

As such, Lesehan conducted what they considered social mappings, bringing together the interests of Perhutani and the locals. Following intensive persuasions and negotiations, both sides agreed to execute the so-called "*plong-plongan*" (alley cropping) planting model, lines for agricultural crops (seasonal crops, such as corns, peanuts, soybeans, and chilis, and perennial crops, such as fruit trees) and forest species (teak) are alternately allocated one after another, as opposed to the traditional agricultural cropping under trees. As stated in a booklet of the NGO, the idea was inspired by the Management Regime (MR) approach, promoted by a professor from Gadjah Mada University. Although the MR concept -focused on planting models for different local needs and conditions– was trialed around the early 1990s in several KPHs in East Java with the funding from Perhutani's central management, it was not implemented at field scales by the company. Prior to the massive tree raids, it was initially not adopted at operational scales by the company due to concerns about the

profits falling as it reduced land allocated for tree species.

A source from the NGO claimed that its proposal was accepted by Perhutani because the forest had already degraded, indicating the company's motivation to use local people to reforest the land. In fact, as previously mentioned, the use of cheap or even free labor for reforestation was one of the core motives of Perhutani in allowing temporal tree cropping under young forest stands (see also Sahide et al., 2020). The NGO further developed a sharing mechanism from the harvests of all planted commodities. Perhutani was to obtain 10% of the local people's commodities in exchange for 25% of tree harvest values (at least 50 years for teak harvest). This arrangement was interesting, as in practice, Perhutani obtained immediate benefits from seasonal crops; meanwhile, the shares from tree harvests were uncertain. It also benefited from the active participation of local people in reforesting the degraded land. Following the agreement, the occurrences of conflicts between both sides declined markedly, whereas reforestation activities brought some results due to less sabotage from local people.

4.2 NGOs in the implementation of PHBM social forestry

The reform period following the downfall of the authoritarian regime at the end of the 1990s, as previously mentioned, also brought waves of reform on the national forest governance. It first brought the decentralization policy by which the central government transferred a high degree of authority and autonomy for local level affairs (see Barr et al., 2006). In the forest management context in Java, it led to increased political and social pressures for the liquidation of Perhutani. Responding to this occurrence, the central office of Perhutani, through the Decree of its Supervisory No. 136/Kpts/Dir/2001, introduced the PHBM social forestry. As previously mentioned, PHBM social forestry is a joint forest management model between Perhutani and local communities. It is centered around the incentive-based arrangements (benefit-sharing) between the two parties based on their respective contribution in the management of the forests. The national policy processes around that time pointed out the company's preference on the joint management model (*pengelolaan bersama*) to community-based forest management (*pengelolaan hutan berbasis masyarat*). For Perhutani, the benefit sharing model was a ploy to halt tree raids from forests. Legal management permits to local communities were not preferred as it meant losing authorities over the forests and could have forest loss and degradation given the social and political volatility.

In some regions, designs and models of PHBM social forestry failed to satisfy local governments, which exercised their own management models for forests (see Adi et al., 2004). The then Regent of Ngawi was also determined to see changes in Perhutani's forest management style. He once made a political statement in the Javanese proverb "*luwih becik pager mangkok tinimbang pager tembok*," generally translated as "better to offer some bowls instead of using concrete walls' which can be understood of encouraging Perhutani to being more generous to local people providing them with better livelihood so that it does not necessarily need to protect its forests. Nonetheless, the Regent did not seek radical changes, such as the acquisition of Perhutani's forests or transfer of forest management authorities to local governments. He believed that Perhutani had already had the necessary systems, tools, and resources to manage forests and only needed to change its approach to local people. This apparent support to Perhutani could be explained from the aforementioned historical synergies between the local government and the company. Some interviewees pointed out his family background that his father was working at Perhutani. Insights from the local government office offer a more sensible explanation for the fact that he attempted to

avoid political volatility that could have occurred by supporting radical changes.[1] Either way, the District Regent relatively welcomed ideas on how to fit PHBM social forestry into the local context.

In 2002, the Regency Government, through its Regional Research and Development Office, invited an NGO called *Belantara Insan Nusantara* (*Bintara*) that was established and supported by several academics from the University of Gadjah Mada (Yogyakarta) to conduct studies and explore potential forest management alternatives. The NGO came up with Cooperative Forest Management (CFM), which was practically a renamed MR strategy. It is not surprising a little as the NGO's founders were the mastermind of what they called the locally-fit MR. In fact, there was only a slight difference between Perhutani's PHBM and Bintara's CFM. The former was centered around joint cooperation between Perhutani and local communities while the letter offered a multistakeholder platform for supporting the joint management model. The CFM model further advocated that local governments could play roles in supporting forest management, including by dedicating some of their decentralization policy budgets. This idea appeared as a strategic maneuver of the NGO to obtain (financial) support for its activities.

Through the agreement 522/06/PK/415.01/11/2004 dated May 26, 2004, Bintara, the local government, and Perhutani established an NGO consortium with the main task to further operationalize PHBM social forestry in different local socioeconomic contexts. The consortium comprised Bintara itself; Lesehan, which was previously mentioned to have conducted a pilot project in sub-FMU Bringin; and two local NGOs, namely, Prima and Pinbuk. Instead of exercising locally-fit PHBM models, as it turned out, the NGO consortium conducted the familiarization/dissemination of PHBM on local communities and the establishment of legally registered LMDHs to be eligible as Perhutani's partners in PHBM. It also provided several trainings for improving the administrative and technical competence of LMDHs. Budgets for these activities were covered by local governments, which had disbursed approximately 2.5 billion IDR to support PHBM social forestry for the following six years.

However, the NGO consortium was constrained by an internal power struggle to have additional roles on the ground. As suggested by a consortium member, the constraint was due to the available funding to some extent. It eventually led them to focus only on reaching the targets of formalizing local institutions to implement PHBM, instead of working on their initial ideas of implementing different social forestry models for villages with different socioeconomic challenges. At the same time, Perhutani bypassed its activity by deploying its own community assistance team (*Tim Pendamping Masyarakat/TPM*). In 2006, the forest company hired another NGO as its TPM to prepare PHBM implementation even in villages that were initially covered by the NGO consortium. The following years saw the rapid formalization of LMDHs across the Regency and the ratification of the PHBM agreement between LMDHs and Perhutani. Overall, PHBM is firmly implemented in all villages in Ngawi. The agreements on the partnership and the strategic and tactical plans for PHBM social forestry in different villages have used a similar template and appeared to have been unilaterally prepared by the state company. This situation contradicted the initial belief that it was prepared in a participatory and deliberative manner. Several studies and evaluation reports have also highlighted such a case (see Diantoro et al., 2014; Setiahadi et al., 2017).

[1] Aspirations for radical changes in other regions have created political tensions and complexities between the local governments and Perhutani supported by the central government, i.e. Ministry of Forestry and Ministry of Internal Affairs (see Adi et al., 2004)

At this stage, Perhutani appeared to be successful in ensuring one-fits-all PHBM social forestry and navigating the push for incorporating different local socioeconomic conditions into it. It was further enhanced in 2014 when the central government later reclaimed authorities over forestry from the local administration. Consequently, the Regency Forest Service was abolished, and virtually no local government budget was allocated for forestry, including in the social forestry context. At the same time, the presence of forest-related NGOs in the Regency, apart from Perhutani's TPM, dwindled significantly due to lack of financial support. This condition made it easier for KPH Ngawi to control local people by implementing PHBM according to its own style.

4.3 NGOs around the implementation of IPHPS social forestry

Following the 2014 presidential election, social forestry and agrarian reform in Indonesia have been further bolstered. First, the government has pledged to allocate additional forestland for programs. Innovations in policies have also been exercised, including formalizing social forestry in the Perhutani forest zone as MoEF's social forestry scheme. As previously mentioned, the Ministry either recognizes the continuation of PHBM-joint management (*Pengakuan dan Perlindungan Kemitraan Kehutanan*/Kulin KK) or introduces the permit-based IPHPS, which has drawn much attention. On the one hand, it is seen as a victory for forest communities; it offers local communities greater rights, access, and authority in managing forest resources (Ota, 2019; Suharjito, 2018; Ragandhi et al., 2021). On the other hand, it places great pressure on Perhutani; its authority over the IPHPS-dedicated forest land is to be annulled, eventually reducing the state forest area under its management and the revenue. Refusals to IPHPS also come from the workers' union of the company, fearing the knockdown effect that the reduction of Perhutani's forest area may streamline the current management structures and operation lines.

In Ngawi, IPHPS social forestry was not well-thought by most FMU management and operational lines, which swiftly deployed its TPM, i.e., Palapa NGO, to exercise strategies mitigating potential adverse effects on the company. The NGO swiftly came door-to-door, i.e., to LMDHs implementing PHBM social forestry, to familiarize them with the new government policy, guide them in choosing social forestry options, and crucially motivate them not to apply for IPHPS. Its chairperson substantiated its reasoning for supporting the company interest, bluntly saying: "*we are contracted by them, we have to do for the best of their interests*."

A direct observation showed that in practice, the NGO used several strategies to convince them of the drawbacks of the IPHPS model. To communities, it used dominant information, underlining the complexity of obtaining permits, pointing out administrative requirements, such forestland mapping that communities lack technical expertise and financial capacities. Even if communities managed to secure permits, the NGO highlighted financial (or the lack of) capacities to invest in forest management activities and cover land taxes. This case contrasts with, as they convinced local communities, the model in which all costs were associated with forest management activities by the state company. When interviewed, the Chairperson of Palapa rhetorically asked if communities can fulfill the requirements of the new scheme. Across Ngawi, there has been a developing sense of "*dimodali Perhutani*" (all expenses paid by Perhutani) or "*modal dewe*" (pay yourself) as a basis of determining the social forestry model. Several community members and leaders generally bought in the argumentation. Given that neither counterbalancing information nor an IPHPS implementation experience exists, coupled with a reflection of limited technical expertise and financial resources, all LMDHs in Ngawi were not enthused by the greater rights that IPHPS offered and chose to continue PHBM in the form of Kulin KK instead.

5. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Granting greater access and rights over forest resources to poor rural communities has been widely touted as a pivotal aspect in social forestry policies. The past few decades have seen the growing potential and importance of NGOs in facilitating communities to exercise such access and rights and helping them better manage forest resources with the far-reaching aim to improve their livelihoods (Duthy & Bolo-Duthy, 2003; Safa, 2006; Wulandari & Inoue, 2018; Kurniasih et al., 2021). In many parts of the world, NGOs have been widely praised for effectively delivering services and offering innovative ideas in poverty alleviation projects, such as social forestry (Ridell & Robinson, 1995; Eversole, 2003). However, there has been unfolding praxis showing the constraints and limitations of NGOs in supporting local communities (Barner & van Laerhoven,2015; Gupta & Koontz, 2019). In some cases, their work does not even reflect the full interests of communities (Barsimantov, 2010; Scherer et al., 2014; Ramdani & Lounela, 2020). As Laraswati et al. (2022) argued, NGOs have in fact evolved into many forms of interest groups, including as extension agents of powerful external stakeholders, which aim to skew the outcomes of social forestry practices from the initial goals.

In Indonesia, the reform period, the decentralization and its aftermath, following the collapse of the authoritarian New Order regime, has seen the more democratic society and the proliferation of civil society movement. The number of NGOs has sharply increased; they have been playing more significant roles in policy processes in various issues and at various political landscapes (for instance see Hasyim et al., 2020; Harada et al., 2022; Rahayu et al., 2023). In this study, we aim to provide a further understanding of the roles of NGOs in social forestry implementation. Ngawi has been characterized by the high dependency of rural communities on forests for their daily livelihoods, making an excellent case for social forestry projects. The significantly long span of our analysis also provides rich empirical evidence of a range of NGO motivations, and consequently, activities, in engaging with forest communities. The first decade of social forestry in Ngawi had shown the emergence of local NGOs trying to promote people-centered and equitable forest management models as opposed to the exclusionary policy by the state forest company. This local dynamic reflects the changing state-civil society relationships. This period has seen the proliferation of civil society movement at national and local levels nationwide in response to the strong state hegemony, including in the forest sector (Okamoto, 2001; Radjawali et al., 2017; Harada et al., 2022; Rahayu et al., 2022). During the reform period, the involvement of NGOs has been made as a key requirement for legitimate policy making processes and implementation.

In social forestry policy, there are different types of NGOs, with regard to their interests and the way they operate. Some NGOs continue to be idealistic or alter strategies amidst their obvious limitation *vis-à-vis* more powerful actors. In constrast, some NGOs have been and remain pragmatic in their approaches in pursuing self-interests. This dynamic -captured in the case of social forestry policy in the studied regions- has shed light on why social forestry, in spite of decades of intervention, has yet to fully deliver its objectives. Our studied case has captured such rich and diverse roles and interests of different NGOs.

The studied NGOs and their consortium aimed to mediate persistent conflicts between local communities and the forest administration and to advocate greater access by people to forest resources. They played roles as mediators, facilitators, and motivators for local community groups in forming legally recognized institutions for social forestry projects. They were also successful in convincing the local government

to significantly support local development. Their benevolent work was later constrained by the expectation of producing quick outcomes. Cases of the target-driven service delivery hindering the ideal agendas are widespread across the country and the globe (Bikkina & Sarin, 2013; Gooding, 2017; Kazi & Analoui, 2019). Our case reveals that the studied NGOs were also involved in internal conflicts, competing for influences and financial resources. As such, instead of delivering the initial goals to exercise improved management models for local people, their activities only focused on administrative tasks and facilitated the blind acceptance of the terms and conditions set by the company's PHBM.

The extent to which the studied NGOs altered the motivation and adjusted their strategies cannot be separated from the context of power relations. In many cases, NGOs heavily depend on funding source availability, without which they face challenges sustaining their development work Khieng & Dahles, 2015; Dupuy et al., 2015). Such makes them prone to influence and steering powerful actors offering financial incentives to sustain their activities. This phenomenon was clearly captured from the research location where the studied NGO consortium abandoned its work in delivering the intended services. Our case also shows how an NGO acted as a broker for the interest of a powerful state company vis-à-vis local communities with the core motivation of financial gains. Specifically, the NGO primarily worked in convincing local people to accept a social forestry model favored by the state company. This suggests a rethink on how to sustain NGOs' activities. Sustainable funding, such as endowment trust fund, is often brought to the equation (e.g. see Hasyim et al., 2020) to avoid their dependence on donors or even competitions among themselves. In Indonesia, along with the push for social forestry, goals of eradicating rural poverty have further been bolstered with the government disburses more funding to the village government. Synergies between the two policy interventions could be enhanced, including facilitating the work of NGOs to deliver the promises of social forestry on the ground.

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