

**FROM PRACTICE TO POLICY: AGENCY AND NGO IN
INDONESIA'S PROGRAMME TO TURN OVER SMALL
IRRIGATION SYSTEMS TO FARMERS¹**

Bryan Bruns and Irchamni Soelaiman²

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² Irchamni Soelaiman was team leader of the LP3ES turn over consultancy, 1987-90. He is now Head of the Centre for Irrigation Development and Studies at LP3ES, Jalan S Parman No 81, Slipi, Jakarta 11420, PO Box 1493 JKT, Jakarta 10002, Indonesia. Tel: (62)21-597211; Fax: (62)21-598785.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Government agencies, donors and researchers are paying increasing attention to the potential contribution of non-government organisations (NGOs) in developing new agricultural technologies and supplementing government research and extension efforts (Wellard, Farrington and Davies, 1990; Farrington and Biggs, 1990). The Indonesian programme to turn over small irrigation systems to water user associations (WUAs) shows how an NGO can go beyond being an intermediary between government and farmers, and instead help a government agency change its standard operating procedures in order to recognise and enhance the role farmers can play in irrigation management.

An Indonesian **NGO** was involved in formulating and implementing turnover activities. The Institute for Social and Economic Research, Education and Information (LP3ES) was founded in 1971 by a group of activist Indonesian intellectuals. Their concerns were widespread poverty, lack of attention to basic rights and the dearth of institutions active in social and economic development. The birth of LP3ES coincided with the government's first five-year plan, which relied on a centralised, technocratic and top-down approach to development.

LP3ES' founders sought to promote the advancement of social science knowledge for development. They wanted to train young people to become key actors in development. They hoped to create an alternative model of development capable of mobilising popular participation. The Frederick Naumann Stiftung, a German NGO, provided financial and technical help for ten years to help LP3ES achieve these objectives.

In the 1970s LP3ES worked in development of religious schools, people's handicrafts and integrated community development. LP3ES carried out field research and distributed information through training, forums and publication in journals and books. Community development became a vehicle to try out models in a learning process together with the people. Government organisations could then disseminate new approaches in wider and more effective ways.

LP3ES is now a relatively large NGO in Indonesian terms, with a staff of over 100 people. It is an example of what David Korten (1987) refers to as a third generation NGO. LP3ES directs its efforts not simply at relief or local community development, but at working with and seeking to change government activities. Transferring management of small irrigation systems back to farmers contains elements of a fourth generation strategy to expand the role of people's organisations in development (Korten, 1990).

2. BUILDING NGO CAPABILITY

LP3ES had been involved in irrigation support and development in four programmes prior to the development of turnover activities.

- (a) LP3ES acted as trainers and facilitators in a programme using community organisers (COs) to improve farmer involvement in the *Sederhana* schemes. These schemes were initially developed in unirrigated areas in the 1970s, but gradually the project included sites where farmer-built schemes already existed. LP3ES recruited, trained and monitored the organisers and facilitated workshops with government agencies. The Department of Agriculture, Department of Public Works (DPW) and Department of Home Affairs participated in the pilot project.
- (b) During its first and second year plans, the government constructed the infrastructure of several large projects, expecting the farmers to build the tertiaries. However, few schemes developed local distribution systems, and the government invited three institutions to collaborate in a pilot programme of assistance 1981-86 funded by the Ford Foundation. Two universities researched hydrological and social issues, and LP3ES became trainer and monitor of the COs. The three met monthly, with the Directorate of Irrigation (DOI) as coordinator.

- (c) Little information was available on indigenous irrigation systems and the implications of government intervention. Research was funded by the Ford Foundation at three provincial universities. LP3ES helped monitor the study and facilitate workshops at the provincial and national level. LP3ES also mediated between government officials and university researchers to help interpret sensitive research results, so that they would be accepted and would provide an agenda for change.
- (d) In 1984, a policy was adopted to develop WUAs, but many government officials felt the need for refinements to guidelines. The Department of Home Affairs in collaboration with LP3ES conducted a study of the roles and functions of WUA from 1986-90 in five provinces. The National Planning Board, Provincial Planning Boards, Department of Agriculture and Department of Public Works also took part in the project. In this project LP3ES carried out a new role as facilitator for an inter-ministerial study and helped transmit results from the provinces back to the centre. The methods used by the project helped to build a consensus on the need to give WUAs stronger status, so they could enter into contracts, open bank accounts and take other legal action.

Thus, during the 1980s LP3ES built up experience and credibility in dealing with the institutional aspects of irrigation development (Tobing 1989, Dilts et al, 1988). LP3ES staff developed a network of contacts and shared experience with irrigation officials at the national and provincial levels and with university researchers. Action research, process documentation, working groups, policy dialogue and other techniques were refined as means for collaborating in the development of methods for involving farmers in the design, construction and management of irrigation systems.

3. THE TURNOVER PROGRAMME

Turnover was a new activity which required developing and refining new methods and training staff. The Ford Foundation provided funds for the Directorate of Irrigation I (DOI-I) to contract LP3ES as social and institutional consultants. Through 1989, the International Irrigation Management Institute (IIMI) conducted research and made recommendations concerning the turnover process. In 1990/1991 the Institute for Agrobusiness Development was responsible for research and

documentation of turnover, using university staff who had worked in IIMI's research. Engineers from government-owned consulting companies assisted the Provincial Irrigation Services (PRIS) in the design and construction of improvements.

A working group formed in 1987 from staff of DOI-I, the Ford Foundation, IIMI and LP3ES to devise a framework for turnover. This drew heavily on the approaches developed in the pilot projects discussed above. The framework, discussed in the earlier paper by Bruns and Atmanto, uses a series of activities to prepare farmers and irrigation systems for turnover. PRIS staff (called TP4s) identify potential sites based on existing records and their own knowledge. Their role is similar to the institutional organisers and community organisers used in other irrigation projects in Asia. The TP4s attend a series of four training courses: inventory, profile and WUA development, design and construction, and preparation for turnover.

Field staff first inventory a system to collect basic information on physical condition, current management and past government construction assistance. TP4s then gather more detailed information profiling system conditions, management and problems. They begin to work with farmers to develop the WUA, if one already exists, or otherwise to form a new one.

The TP4 helps farmers prepare design requests, which are integrated with technical design considerations to produce final designs. The PRIS or contractors build the improvements in the following budget year. They hire local labour and purchase materials locally as much as possible. The TP4 works with farmers to prepare for farmer operation and maintenance of the system. The government then formally turns over system assets and authority for operation and maintenance to the WUA.

This process was elaborated and refined as the project continued. LP3ES played several roles in developing the process for turnover and strengthening the capability of the government to carry out turnover.

4. NGO ROLES

4.1. Training Government Staff to Work with Farmers

LP3ES acted as trainer in the turnover, though having an NGO responsible for training government officials was itself new and unusual. Agency

officials accepted this role of TP4 training relatively easily, and it provided an entry into other activities. As trainer, LP3ES could directly contribute to changes which would enable local organisations to play a stronger role in development.

LP3ES had been training community change agents to work in urban and rural areas since the 1970s, and in the irrigation pilot projects, put particular emphasis on making trainees active, aware participants in learning.

LP3ES directly organised training of the TP4s during the first budget year of turnover. Then, during subsequent years, the PRIS had primary responsibility for training, with LP3ES acting as consultant. LP3ES provincial consultants remained heavily involved in planning and implementing training, especially in sessions dealing with social issues such as WUA development. In 1989, LP3ES wrote training materials and conducted courses to prepare provincial officials to carry out training.

Training provided an easily understood entry role for LP3ES. But even in the HPSIS project it had been clear that training alone was not sufficient. Implementing a participatory approach required new procedures, many of which could not be fully anticipated in advance and which often required decisions at senior levels. LP3ES faced a shift from direct implementation to the role of consultant providing support and preparing for eventual phasing out its role.

4.2. Consulting to Build Agency Capabilities

Turnover activities began in late 1987 with pilot efforts at about seventy sites, in two provinces. In 1988 the project expanded to two more provinces. Each province had a coordinator from LP3ES, supervised by a sociologist responsible for several provinces. The team leader and institutional advisor based in Jakarta took an active role in developing procedures.

Initially, coordinators frequently worked directly in the field in order to solve problems and show TP4s how to work with farmers. Almost all of the LP3ES staff had originally worked as community organisers in earlier projects, and some had become supervisors of community organisers. They were capable and comfortable working directly with farmers. However, this level of intensive consultant assistance was not sustainable given the rate of expansion the project faced nor consistent with the goal of strengthening *agency* capabilities, to work with farmers in a participatory process.

The TP4 Coordinators began to focus more attention at provincial and sectional level, with less work directly in the field. When DOI-I extended the contract with LP3ES in 1990, their title was changed from TP4 Coordinators to Provincial Social and Institutional Consultants with a broader scope of work. They helped plan programme implementation, helped plan and carry out training, participated in meetings at the provincial and sectional level, monitored the progress of implementation, and helped troubleshoot problems as they occurred. They and their co-workers tried to attend some key field activities such as meetings for design integration. The newness of the turnover activities made such support necessary, and formal training alone was clearly insufficient.

To maintain relations with agency staff the consultants had to give high priority to meeting targets, while still keeping longer term goals in mind. They had to make choices about where to direct the most effort. Some goals, such as participation in design, showed more progress and received more attention. For other goals, such as establishment of WUAs, the formal requirements were satisfied, but circumstances made progress slower in the local adaptation of organisations and use of thorough bottom-up approach.

DPW officials would have liked more help. LP3ES' consultants in Jakarta and the provinces lived with a continuing tension between the short run goals of meeting programme targets and the longer run goal of institutionalising a participatory process of irrigation development and turnover.

4.3. Collaboration in Drafting Procedures and Manuals

The third role LP3ES played was in devising the methods for turnover. This process took place not simply within a small pilot project but as part of the establishment of a large, and increasingly routine programme.

Working groups included representatives from DOI-I, IIMI, Ford Foundation and LP3ES, and sometimes provincial irrigation service officials. As the project evolved, working groups transformed and became much more linked to formulating specific guidelines for activities.

The first general guidelines for turnover were followed by more specific work on the inventory methods. The socio-technical profile underwent a similar process of pretesting and revision. However, by this time the project

had already expanded beyond the initial pilot areas. For subsequent stages it was no longer possible to carefully pretest each stage.

A long series of meetings during 1989 eventually produced the Ministerial Ordinance on Implementing Guidelines for Turnover. The ordinance was formulated after field activities had allowed extensive testing, learning and refinement of many aspects of the turnover process.

DOI-I and PRIS officials and LP3ES staff, used the same collaborative approach to develop additional specific guidelines for turnover tasks, including manuals for preparing O&M guidelines for each system, design of irrigation system improvements and WUA formation and development.

Much time was spent in word by word revision of manuals and other documents, writing by committee. While seemingly inefficient, this process provided a forum for discussing many issues. The working group meetings maintained contact between those involved in the project. The process helped to build a sense of agency ownership. Materials were not simply produced by consultants and then ratified by the agency. Instead, agency staff played a major role in writing and extensively revising the manuals. The losses in short term efficiency were offset by advantages in terms of communication, cooperation and agency ownership of the results.

There was a genuine risk that much time would be spent compiling manuals which would never be read. However, agency officials strongly desired detailed guidelines on how to carry out turnover. Putting procedures into official manuals did constitute an important form of recognition of the importance placed on participation.

Changing how government agencies work is not simply a matter of high policy decisions (D Korten, 1980; F Korten, 1987a). LP3ES and the PRIS had to test and refine new procedures in the field and then discuss them with senior decision-makers. Government staff were not just carrying out orders from above, but acting as partners in creating something new which was enriched by their knowledge. Learning evolved in a cycle from policy to practice and back to policy. This collaborative process of learning institutionalised the new methods required for turnover.

5. CONDITIONS FOR COLLABORATION

Some pre-conditions made collaboration between an NGO and government agency possible, such as a political environment which was not actively hostile. LP3ES had experience with training and fielding community development workers on other projects, with goals of strengthening the role of people's organisations in the development process. Government officials believed that LP3ES had relevant skills and LP3ES saw a chance to pursue its own goals, so both were willing to try to work together.

5.1. Compromise and Reformism

First, and probably the most important condition for collaboration, is that the NGO accepts an incremental reformist approach to change, and the messy choices of reform. Working together with government officials requires trying to improve existing conditions. The prevalent political conditions will often limit the scope for alternative choices or more confrontational approaches.

Choosing to work collaboratively requires some sacrifices in terms of outspoken advocacy and criticism, particularly as an NGO may gain access to sensitive internal information about the agency. Creating a political scandal could easily poison cooperation with the agency. Relations with agency staff are likely to breakdown unless there is a basic agreement on the need to make compromises and take a patient, reformist approach.

There are fewer opportunities for the NGO for media attention, but perhaps more prospect of making substantive changes. Incentives for taking a reformist approach include the potential wide impact even small changes in government practices can have.

Prospects of success may be too dismal, or the compromises required too great and the better choice is not to cooperate. Even after cooperation has begun it may turn out to be infeasible.

5.2. Trust and Sensitivity

Creating and maintaining trust was an essential part of the process of working together. LP3ES staff had to assume that DPW would follow its commitments. DPW had to trust that LP3ES could make participation in

irrigation development work. The long series of joint projects gradually built mutual trust.

Sensitive issues kept arising. If DPW was to listen to LP3ES' views then credibility was essential. Given ambiguities and incomplete information, it was easy to take things out of context or make different interpretations of the same facts. The need was to create an interpretation of events which DPW could agree with. This sometimes involved a process best described as negotiation. The issue was not to force the agency to agree with LP3ES, but to find an interpretation which fitted the available information while respecting the experience of DPW officials. Based on such an agreed interpretation of events, it might then be possible to draw conclusions and make changes.

Even internal written reports to the agency required a degree of self-censorship and sensitivity. Many topics could only be freely addressed verbally to seek solutions, making frequent NGO-agency interactions essential.

The need for sensitivity is linked to the sometimes huge gaps between policy and actual implementation. Working with an agency required recognising the diversity of practices in different areas, and looking for ways to use the creativity, flexibility and local initiative it represented. The pace of change was a subject for continual negotiation. LP3ES was one of many influences in the continuing process of restructuring how the agency worked with farmers.

5.3. Funding Linkages

The Ford Foundation chose to channel irrigation funding to LP3ES through the government. LP3ES' contracts with the government specified its responsibilities, though in practice both sides needed substantial flexibility to respond to project needs. In the case of turnover the Ford Foundation also gave a parallel grant directly to LP3ES to strengthen its ability to carry out work in irrigation.

Ford Foundation funding was relatively flexible, without a heavy administrative overhead. A series of grants were made, each for two or three years. The major grants were in the range of a few hundred thousand dollars, although smaller grants were given to support specific activities.

Over ten years, several million dollars was spent on the irrigation activities, much of which was channelled through government agencies.

Ford Foundation staff kept in contact with officials at many levels. They took part in preparing contracts, kept track of implementation and tried to ensure that financial and administrative problems did not impede progress. They attended field meetings and maintained informal contacts, especially before meetings to help encourage a consensus so that meetings would be fruitful. Agency-NGO collaboration took place in the context of a very activist role on the part of the donor.

Researchers studied improvement of the turnover process. In contrast with projects in the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand, which paired a research institution with an irrigation agency, the work in Indonesia brought together the agency, research institutions and an NGO. Basing research and consultancy in separate institutions created some overlap and tensions, but it encouraged a broader range of ideas about the project. The research organisation's mandate included producing objective, publishable results, therefore researchers' views remained distinct from those of agency and NGO staff involved in implementation. However, the sensitivity of agency officials concerning written statements and formal presentations on issues hampered communication and often made it difficult to take full advantage of research data and analysis.

Funding linkages forced the agency and NGO to keep in contact. The funding structure clearly showed that the NGO must respond to government priorities. However, since the money came from an outside source, government officials also had some accountability to the NGO, if such grants were to continue. The NGO could appeal to the donor if problems occurred. This created a balance of interests which did not guarantee success, but established basic incentives to cooperate.

5.4. Coalition-Building

Bureaucracies are not monolithic. Diverse individuals, divisions, sections, branches and subgroups have varying experiences, interests and priorities. This creates an opportunity to find allies. Coalition building was one of the elements of the process through which Ford Foundation, DPW, universities and LP3ES worked together.

In the various projects, some agency staff worked intensively to create new approaches, while some took part in workshops and seminars. Donor, NGO and agency staff identified people interested in participatory approaches, who could be included in working groups and other activities. They talked, discussed and sought conclusions about how to make change feasible. The result was not unanimity on every issue, but the creation of a coalition, a set of people with shared goals about creating new approaches to irrigation development.

This process continued throughout the turnover project. Some people felt strong personal commitments. Others contributed because the project was part of their job. However, they were able to work together. Funding linkages and contracts were reinforced by a network of personal relationships.

This network has survived a near total changeover in the actual people working on the project. New people need time to learn about project activities but a coalition seems able to persist, which is not simply dependent on one or two specific individuals. It does, however, depend on having a group of people willing and able to invest sufficient energy in the project.

5.5. Educated Opportunism

Turnover involved a range of issues. It had a broad goal of reversing government takeover of small irrigation systems. It had a fundamental concern that government recognise the special characteristics of small, locally-managed irrigation systems, and develop appropriate policies. The programme sought to institutionalise a participatory process of design and construction. It intended to strengthen WUAs. Given this multiplicity of goals, priorities had to be set and adjusted over time. In hindsight it would be easy to miss these choices, or to act as if the particular outcome which actually occurred was the only choice. For example, the questions of whether to turn over assets or only management authority, whether to turn over the entire irrigation system or only the headworks, were the subject of discussion in early phases of the project.

Given the range of issues, NGO and donor staff and agency officials had to make choices about where the greatest potential existed for improving the role of local people in irrigation development. Project staff made these decisions in the context of limited information and much ambiguity. Poor decisions could result in wasting much effort for little gain.

Compromise, trust, coalition building and educated opportunism are particularly important in a political culture such as Indonesia's which stresses consensus in making decisions, rather than confrontational, adversarial processes. Nevertheless, if the goal is joint action by an NGO and government then these issues will probably be relevant in any country, to avoid the dangers of becoming trapped in sterile debates and mutual hostility, and to establish a context for productive cooperation.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The turnover programme is an example of how an NGO can play a role in changing the ways a bureaucracy works with farmers, through training agency staff, developing concepts and institutionalising new methods. This demonstrates that NGOs are capable of working at multiple levels from farming communities to national policy formulation.

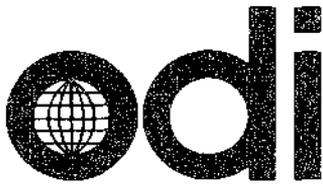
The turnover programme linked the NGO's concern with local organisations and social aspects of development with the delivery of government technical and financial assistance. A series of projects evolved methods and demonstrated the feasibility of more participatory approaches. The programme of technical assistance embodied methods for enabling participation and empowerment, improving government capacity to work with farmers. A fundamental restructuring of government relations with local organisations was implemented.

NGOs have the advantages of flexibility, creativity, local knowledge and understanding of institutional issues. This suits them for a role as innovators collaborating to develop new approaches and consultants helping institutionalise capabilities within agencies. LP3ES' work in the project to turn over small irrigation systems to farmers is an illustration of how an NGO can accelerate research and development of institutional innovations in the ways government works with local organisations.

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Overseas Development Institute
Regent's College, Inner Circle,
Regent's Park, London NW1 4NS
England.
Telephone: +44 71 487 7413
Telex: 94082191 ODIUK
Fax: +44 71 487 7590