



RESOURCE

Participation and Power Dynamics Between International Non-Governmental Organisations and Local Partners: A Rural Water Case Study in Indonesia

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Description / Abstract

Community-Based Management (CBM) is an important part of Indonesia's goal of universal access to water. However, approaches to CBM tend to neglect the impact of power relationships between community-based organisations (CBOs) and their external donor partners on CBO management capacity. This paper explores the power dynamics between a CBO and their donor partner, the international NGO Engineers Without Borders Australia (EWB), in a rural water supply project in Tenganan, Indonesia. A diffracted power frame was used to analyse the response of CBO power to EWB's participatory approach. The approach was sensitised to power, gave primacy to the CBO's vision, used local assets, and had a flexible timeline. The CBO's power was evident in the strength of its vision, its resistance to government involvement, the occasional rejection of technical advice from EWB, and its increased confidence in its capacity to manage Tenganan's water supply. The findings reinforce the political nature of participation, with implications for approaches to establishing CBM in Indonesia and elsewhere. Strengthened outcomes in rural water supply are likely to result from greater self-reflection by external partners regarding their own positionality, coupled with a focus on strategies for maintaining and enhancing the power of CBOs.

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