

Introduction and Summary

Grassroots Leadership and Popular Education in Indonesia

Reflections and Suggestions from Movements for Social and Environmental Change

based on interviews and conversations
with dozens of indigenous leaders and elders,
activists, educators, and movement-builders



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Grassroots Leadership and Popular Education in Indonesia is a new publication by LifeMosaic and The Samdhana Institute. The book sets out to analyse and recommend ways to support grassroots leadership development and popular education in order to strengthen movements for social and environmental change – in Indonesia and around the world.

The book is for grassroots leaders, activists, educators and movement-builders in Indonesia and beyond, for all those participating in systemic change towards a more equitable and sustainable future, with the hope that in these pages there is a spark that gives you energy on your journey.

Please read this **Introduction and Summary**, the first chapter of the book to be serialised.

The rest of the book will be serialised during 2015, to increase the chances of its pages being read by those interested in the work of supporting the emergence of more grassroots leaders. The full version of the book will be published after the serialisation. Please subscribe to www.lifemosaic.net to receive the next chapters.

Please send your comments, critiques and stories to leadership@lifemosaic.net, or leave a comment on facebook [hyperlink to FB page] or twitter [hyperlink to twitter].

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Introduction and Summary

Introduction

The forces of nature are intact, the land, the air, the village, and the rivers are as they were in the beginning. There is little destruction, harvests are plentiful, the land is fertile... leaders make wise rules... There is peace, prosperity and well-being... The honey trees are cared for.

– Dayak Kualatn Leaders Vision of the Future, Simpakng Hulu, West Kalimantan, 2001.

Imagine a future when Indonesia's indigenous peoples and local communities have secure rights to their territories and are able to sustainably manage their territories, forests and resources. Imagine a time when these communities have revitalised their cultures, improved their livelihoods, and are determining their futures, free from human rights abuses; divide and rule tactics; and fear of losing their lands.

This transformation will require, among other things: policy changes; legal challenges; fairer spatial planning; more equitable and sustainable rules for extractive industries, plantations and markets; behavioural change; and stamping out corruption. This work will need to be supported, as it is now, by lawyers, academics, researchers, artists, activists and others.

However, for such a deep systemic transformation to come about *and* to be genuinely implemented on the ground, it will need to be led and defended by confident, resilient grassroots movements for social and environmental change. Over the next years and decades, existing Indonesian movements will need to step up their work of designing and demanding change, creating inspiring community-led alternatives, as well as continuing to defend community territories and rights.

At present a relatively small pool of activists and community leaders are attempting to address the ever-greater problems faced by Indonesia's communities and ecosystems. Overworked, overwhelmed and drowning in a constant torrent of environmental destruction and human rights abuses, many activists and leaders are either burning out, selling out, or dying young.

For the movements to become stronger and more resilient, they will need to create the conditions that allow the emergence of many more community leaders, leaders with integrity, critical analysis, vision and skills who can facilitate their communities to determine their futures and defend their rights.

This book on *Grassroots Leadership and Popular Education in Indonesia* sets out to analyse and recommend ways to support grassroots leadership development and popular education in order to strengthen Indonesian movements for social and environmental change.

Summary Part I

Grassroots Leadership and Popular Education in Indonesia is in 2 parts. Part I sets out the basic premise at the heart of the book.

Indonesia's communities, forests, and movements for positive social and environmental transformation face unprecedented challenges (Chapter 1). A global rush for ever scarcer resources, the risks of breaching multiple planetary boundaries which have enabled human life on Earth, increasing inequality, and the loss of biological and cultural diversity create the conditions for future social and environmental collapse. While there has been some progress towards community rights in Indonesia, this has been held back by large-scale land acquisition, environmental destruction, and growing agrarian conflict.

Though Indonesian policy advocacy and campaigning are strong, interviewees for this research critique the insufficient support given to critical education and grassroots leadership. Much advocacy aims to show just how bad the situation is. Inadvertently this can reinforce the neo-liberal doctrine that *There is No Alternative to Endless Growth* and its associated injustice and environmental destruction.

Paulo Freire, a key thinker on popular education, recognised that throughout history, hopeless moments have been followed by radical change.¹ To make hope possible, we must tell the stories and build the structures of a better world. To support a deep process of transformation, critical thinking needs to expand at all levels of society. One way of addressing these challenges is to renew and strengthen leadership in Indonesia's social movements. Yet in many ways leadership is in crisis (Chapter 2).

Top-down leadership, prevalent across business, government and civil society, is failing to address the complexity of today's social and environmental problems. So-called 'heroic' leadership fails because individuals are incapable of solving systemic crises; and because people who put all their trust and hope in heroes often give up on their *own* capacity to lead and to change the world.

At the same time customary indigenous leadership and leadership systems are often under severe strain because of rapidly changing external circumstances including the loss of land; centralising institutions; high speed communications and transport systems; and pressures from aggressive large-scale developments. According to interviewees, the hand-over of indigenous leadership to a new generation is at times hindered by cultural influences on the young; outmigration; restricted youth and women's roles in customary institutions; and a lack of intergenerational trust.

Top-down heroic leadership has been found wanting. Indigenous leadership systems have much to offer, but are under strain from rapid change. There is a need for transformative, participatory leadership that allows the emergence of collective wisdom, to help solve the systemic problems that humanity faces.

Renewing leadership (Chapter 3) requires an analysis of the nature of power, making a choice between authority-based and collaborative systems. Movements for social change need to develop a vision of the future to understand the kinds of leadership they need to move towards this vision.

A transformative approach means leadership does not need to be about handing out orders, but can focus on facilitating others to contribute and participate to the best of their abilities.

¹ Adapted from Shirley Steinberg, in <http://www.freireproject.org/content/paulo-freire-1921-1997>

Leadership need not be limited to a select few, instead everyone can develop leadership skills and qualities. Finally leadership is not limited to individuals, and it is important to recognise and nurture collective leadership by organisations, networks and movements.

For indigenous peoples, renewing leadership does not mean re-inventing governance systems and institutions, but reviewing and revitalising them. Any changes need to come from within, recognising what is already there, and what isn't, looking at what has worked and what hasn't, and evaluating how institutions and customary laws are dealing with changing circumstances.

Most of these ideas on renewing leadership are simple and have existed for thousands of years. Many have been central to traditional leadership ideals in many indigenous societies. Nonetheless putting transformative leadership into practice requires the thoughtful and profound transformation of individuals, social relations and institutions. This is precisely the kind of transformation that the family of educational approaches known as popular education (Chapter 4) is designed to facilitate.

As well as describing the basic principles of popular education, Chapter 4 compares the histories of the approach in Latin America and Indonesia. For 30 years Latin American popular education was used to boost adult literacy, resist dictatorships and create alternative models of society. In the early 1990s, when the Cold War came to an end, dictatorships were replaced by democracies, and ideological stances splintered into single-issue movements, Latin American popular education lost its certainties and its relevance and was plunged into crisis.

However Latin American popular education succeeded in reinventing itself,² through a deliberate process of reflecting on its successes and failures (the action-reflection spiral). – Today popular education is a key factor behind powerful social and environmental movements – including some of the most successful indigenous peoples movements in the world – that offer compelling critiques and alternatives to neo-liberal economics and the resource-intensive industrial growth society.

In 1990s Indonesia, popular education helped strengthen the movements resisting the Soeharto dictatorship. After the downfall of Soeharto, the arrival of the Reform Era, and the fragmentation of the movements, popular education lost its momentum and relevance.

Indonesian popular education has reached a low ebb. Faced with similar conditions, Latin American popular education refounded itself and became stronger than before. Drawing a parallel with the story of the Latin American *refounding of popular education*, this book argues that this is the time to reflect, relearn, and refound popular education in Indonesia as a key tool to strengthen grassroots leadership and movements, and to address the ever more complex crises faced in the country today.

Roem Topatimasang says: *We haven't done our homework for decades. Now we need to start. We need to re-school society, re-school the organisations, and re-think the methodology of movement-building.*

² This was a process known as the *refundamentación*, literally the refounding of popular education.

Summary Part II

The second part of *Grassroots Leadership and Popular Education in Indonesia* provides a sourcebook covering concrete examples of popular education and leadership initiatives, appropriate approaches, indications on how to develop a curriculum, and a list of possible syllabus points.

Chapter 5 describes an assortment of institutional set-ups for successful initiatives in popular education and indigenous education. Non-indigenous initiatives range from the regional support structures that enabled the refounding of Latin American popular education; the Highland Center, which trained Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King in the American Civil Rights Movement; and student immersion programmes in Indonesia and the Philippines.

Many of the indigenous educational initiatives described are from Mindanao in the Philippines, including Pamulaan, a tertiary college for indigenous youth, and the Schools of Living Traditions, where children learn about their culture from a young age, taught by living masters (cultural specialists). A key Latin American initiative is also described. Intercultural Bilingual Education, known as EIB from its Spanish acronym,³ has transformed education for indigenous peoples in schools and universities in almost 20 countries in the region.

Chapter 6 covers a variety of approaches to grassroots leadership development and popular education, with topics including adapting popular education for women; culturally based approaches (revitalising language, customary law, leadership systems, history and identity) and *Plan de Vida*, a tool for community empowerment and self-determination that involves indigenous peoples designing a long term vision and plan for their self-determined development of their territories.

All of the examples in chapter 5 and 6 are part of a trend of decolonising education systems, and rebuilding structures which allow indigenous knowledge, language, and cosmologies to be at the heart of the educational experience.

Chapter 7 is focused on key design elements for curriculum development. A curriculum can mean different things for different people. Depending on the intention behind its design, a curriculum can be a body of knowledge to be transmitted to passive students (the least participatory definition). However a curriculum can also be designed specifically to lead to maximum analysis, participation and critical thinking by learners, leading to informed action for social and environmental transformation.

To allow maximum participation of learners in their course, it is essential to carry out a learning needs assessment as part of developing a curriculum. This ensures that the course responds to a need that the learners have expressed, and starts from the experience of the learners and builds from there.

No single learning experience fits every community or situation. Chapter 8 provides a checklist of potential modules for grassroots leadership and popular education suggested by interviewees in the course of research for this report. Some of the points are addressed to

³ Educación Intercultural Bilingüe

communities, others are more suitable for an NGO audience. Teachers and course facilitators can use this check-list to help develop their own 'critical thinking' course, while keeping in mind that the most important content is likely to come from the learners themselves.

The final chapter (Chapter 9) sets out recommendations for renewing grassroots leadership and popular education in Indonesia. General recommendations to movements for social and environmental change include:

- Support critical analysis in communities.
- Focus on education for critical consciousness instead of training.
- Invest in developing community leadership.
- Revitalise existing institutions, rather than build new ones.
- Work against community dependency on NGOs.
- Create enabling conditions for popular education.
- Support preventative campaigning, rather than firefighting.
- Build momentum by supporting successful struggles.
- Work to make hope possible rather than despair convincing.

Specific recommendations to support refounding popular education in Indonesia include:

- Increase the profile of popular education.
- Hold a gathering of practitioners and other events to refound popular education.
- Strengthen the support structures for popular education (including those groups or networks which host regular reflections on movement-building and approaches).
- Create regular reflections on movement-building and approaches.
- Produce popular education resources that meet the needs of Indonesia's movements.
- Carry out exchanges and study tours.
- Support new models of indigenous education.
- Strengthen popular education in NGOs.
- Lobby funders to support longer-term visions.
- Encourage funding-free strategies.

Recommendations to funders interested in supporting systemic change include:

- Build staff capacity to take this work forward.
- Carry out internal skills-shares on leadership and popular education.
- Revise grant-making procedures to encourage the emergence of leadership and popular education initiatives.
- Include recommendations from this book in approaches to mentoring.
- Take a proactive role in supporting and developing preventative campaigning approaches.
- Plan and fundraise to specifically support leadership and popular education initiatives.
- Support not only rights but also the development of self-determined community development plans and the creation of economic alternatives.
- Invest in training and mentoring cohorts of activist-educators to take the lead in participatory leadership and popular education in future.

About this publication

This book – *Grassroots Leadership and Popular Education in Indonesia* – is based on interviews and conversations with dozens of indigenous leaders and elders, activists, educators, and movement-builders, who all identify the need to train more leaders to share in the task of social and environmental transformation. This is a conversation that is taking place across many movements, with ever greater urgency.

The book analyses the difficult context in which Indonesian movements operate; reflects on critiques and challenges facing existing leadership models; presents approaches (such as participatory leadership and popular education) that help to grow and share leadership for systemic change; describes initiatives in Indonesia, the Philippines and Latin America that can inspire leadership training programmes; provides suggestions for learning needs assessments and curriculum development; and makes concrete recommendations to support increased grassroots leadership development.

Building on existing knowledge and skills, now is a time to rebuild the conditions that support the emergence of new grassroots leadership. *Grassroots Leadership and Popular Education in Indonesia* is designed to inspire and inform that task.

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