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Caught between Mediation and Local Dependence: Understanding the Role of NGOs in Co-management of Coastal Resources in Eastern Indonesia

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Abstract

Resolving contestations over resource management rights around coastal villages remains a focal challenge for co-management initiatives in remote coastal zones. Contemporary socio-political settings increasingly see local people having to negotiate between local long-standing (horizontal) relationships and new emerging (vertical) relationships. The latter often involve collaborations with outside actors who try to assume neutral mediating positions. Using two conflicts, this article examines the rise and fall of a participatory

coastal resource management program in eastern Indonesia involving a fishing community engaged in a co-management arrangement with a conservation NGO. An actor-oriented approach is applied to analyse how these conflicts shape, drive and direct collaborations across the community-NGO interface. We discuss how these impact the implementation of the conservation ethics and sustainable natural resource management practices, and show how particular mediating capacities of an NGO may overcome, and even build forth on, conflict in some contexts but fall short in others. We argue that local resource user groups and conservation teams operate according to strong local relationships that are entrenched in cultural-historical hierarchies of power. We moreover note that these local relationships significantly influence the extent of neutrality of external groups in their mediating, coordinating and technical advisory roles. The effectiveness of co-management partnerships hinges on the ability to balance actors' mediating capacity with their local dependence for operation.

Keywords

Small-scale fisheries; Co-management; Conflict mediation; Eastern Indonesia; Sustainable natural resource management

Introduction

Coral reefs and coastal marine ecosystems in eastern Indonesia are amongst the most bio-diverse in the world and have become recognised conservation target areas (Allen 2008; Burke et al. 2012; Green et al. 2011; Weeks et al. 2014; White et al. 2014). At the same time more than 35 million people inhabit the islands and coastlines of eastern Indonesia, and draw from these ecosystems not only to enact strong cultural identities and lifestyles but also to support livelihoods and feed growing demands from globalizing markets (Resosudarmo and Jotzo 2009). Unsustainable resource use is putting these ecosystems at high risk of depletion (White et al. 2014), with bleak predictions for the quality of the marine environment and its capacity to support livelihoods and address widespread food insecurity amongst vulnerable coastal communities (Foale et al. 2013). Weak fisheries legislation, institutionalised corruption and low enforcement capacity (relative to the immense area coverage) all compound the contemporary challenges in achieving effective coastal resource governance in the region. Regional conservation agreements like the Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs, Fisheries and Food Security (CTI-CFF) have been established to develop local governance capacity, thus recognising the importance of engaging local marine resource dependent communities as frontline conservation actors (Glaser et al. 2010; Ferse et al. 2010). This follows global trends in conservation and development practices over the past two decades towards increased local involvement (Agrawal and Gibson 2001; Brosius, Tsing, and Zerner 2005; Springer 2009) and coincides with political shifts towards decentralisation, with particular reference to Indonesia's *Reformasi* after 1999 (Patlis 2007; Satria, Sano, and Shima 2006; Kusumawati and Visser 2014). Resolving contestations over who and how resources around coastal villages should be managed have become a focal point for conservation programs. Although such contests among resource user groups are by no means new, contemporary socio-political settings demand that local people trade-off existing responsibilities and accountabilities, embedded in their horizontal networks, against new vertical relationships involving collaborations with outside conservation actors. This article identifies the tensions that emerge within and between these horizontal and vertical relationships, and discusses how these impacts the way conservation and natural resource management projects are conducted.

Getting institutions 'right', developing 'best practices' and establishing 'good governance', have become popular mantras among conservation and development agencies. Despite efforts by conservation NGOs in Indonesia to become more participatory, a high degree of failure persists in mobilising local communities to engage in long term sustainable resource management (Ferse et al. 2010). It remains a major challenge to establish effective collaboration at the interface of communities and NGOs. Over the last two decades, co-management approaches have emerged as a primary means to address these challenges, whereby the emphasis is on establishing effective collaboration between external (government or non-government) actors with local actors. In practice the interpretations of what 'collaboration' entails may range from hierarchal co-operation involving marginal consultation of local stakeholder groups to 'flatter' empowering arrangements whereby local resource users claim prominent roles in managing and dictating utility of resources (Brewer

and Moon 2015). Central to these approaches are the roles and responsibilities that are bequeathed to mediating actors to carry out various aspects of coordination in resource management, distribute benefits among particular constituencies, and develop conflict resolution capacity.

Much of the literature that informs contemporary co-management practice focuses on framework designs that can facilitate cooperation (Wamukota, Cinner, and McClanahan 2012), and is devoted to improving such designs to allow for particular forms of resource management to be implemented (Cinner et al. 2009; Pomeroy 1995). Relatively little focus has been placed on examining how the function and reformation of co-management arrangements actually develops over time, and how the rearranging of vital relationships following some form of external shock effects co-management regimes. Conflicts over access and control rights of resources are common, as are conflicts between external agencies and local actor groups. They form an inevitable part of any system where different groups seek control over a common resource base (Christie et al. 2009). Therefore, the conflict resolution capacity amongst actors involved as mediators in a management system is critical in determining the affectivity and durability of particular management strategies. Moreover, conflict management warrants analytical attention since moments of critical tension between groups or individuals distils relationships that exist between a community and NGO, exposing more clearly both cooperative and resisting links which otherwise are not apparent or appear only in very subtle form. Under such conditions actors' mediating positions become most visible and decisive, whereby critical management tensions and gaps are revealed.

In this article we examine the rise and fall of a participatory coastal resource co-management program in eastern Indonesia through two conflicts. We focus on how these conflicts shape, drive and direct collaborations at the community-NGO interface. We apply an actor-oriented approach (Long 2001) to reveal critical tensions that exist or emerge under particular conditions, and examine the exacerbating or mitigating roles individuals play in situations of conflict. In doing so we reveal factors influencing the way in which external co-management partners are subject to strong local relationships that are entrenched in historical socio-political hierarchies through which competing interests are negotiated. Particular focus is put on how local power hierarchies impact on collaborations with an external NGO in the co-management of coastal resources.

Two conflict cases over resource access that took place in and around a coastal community in the Kei Islands located in Maluku Province, in eastern Indonesia, form the empirical basis for this study. The conflicts are presented in chronological order and involve a community's engagement with different actors under a participatory conservation program. The cases illustrate how the mediating position of an NGO, as a co-management partner to a community, is highly subject to existing institutional parameters and is defined by the investments it makes into building links with particular people and local institutions. In the discussion we analyse key events and actors' responses in conflict resolution and, in particular, address how this impacted the community-NGO co-management arrangement. In the conclusion we relate these findings to debates around co-management design and identify critical areas of focus for practitioners of conservation and development.

Methods

A mixed-methods ethnographic approach guided data collection as part of extensive fieldwork in 2011 and during a second shorter visit to Kei in December 2013. The analysis focuses largely on events that took place before the fieldwork and draws from people's accounts, local documentation of events and personal observations. As with many conflicts, people's accounts and responses often leave space for multiple interpretations. Individuals who we closely collaborated with from the village and from the various NGOs became particularly important key informants and helped to obtain accurate accounts of the different conflicts. In verifying accounts and staying true to the various perspectives at play, a suite of qualitative methods were applied, including both structured and unstructured interviews, focus group discussions and participatory observations.

The identities of our key informants and other actors remain anonymous, as do the names and locations of villages. The main case study village is referred to as KK-1, while the frequently cited administrative subdistrict capital that neighbours KK-1 is referred to as KK-2. Reference to individuals is made through the formal public positions they had at the time of fieldwork. The official names of the NGOs featuring to varying extents in the case study are similarly not disclosed. The NGO and co-management partner to KK-1 is referred to as the 'partner NGO'. The two other peripheral NGOs, namely a large coordinating international conservation NGO and its implementing agency are referred to respectively as the 'international conservation NGO' and the 'implementing agency' (Figure 2 shows the organisational arrangement of the actors in the case study).

Mediation at Interfaces, Co-management and Conflict Resolution

This article focuses on the dynamics at the interface of conservation NGOs and a community (KK-1). In referring to an interface we do not suggest this to necessarily be a physical space where people meet, but we apply a broader interpretation of interface as opportunities for exchange and instances of interaction that materialise between actors from different constituencies who come to function within an arena (Long 2001). Such arenas form around particular collaborations or issues that bring people and resources together creating conflict, contestation, or collective action often involving individuals operating as mediators (James 2011; Morgan-Trimmer 2013; De Sardan 2005). These individuals, while they represent a particular constituency's set of norms, values and aspirations, also bring new ideas, perspectives and management approaches to their constituency. They thus operate as important vehicles of influence in both inwardly and outwardly directions. An individual's mediation capacity is measured by their ability to communicate and translate foreign ideas and concepts in such a way that they appeal or at least are understood by a larger constituency. In his extensive work on processes of mediation in development De Sardan (2005, 173) identifies different types of mediators, distinguishing 'brokers' as typically community representatives, or individuals 'implanted in a local arena who serve as intermediaries for the draining off [...] of external resources' from 'agents' as typically

project staff of government or non-government organisations facilitating processes of conservation and development. Given our focus on NGO positioning, the role of agents is of particular interest, and involves them assuming often ambiguous and contradicting functions, whereby they defend their personal interests and those of their represented institution, and mediate various local actors' interests (De Sardan 2005, 172).

In the context of conflict resolution, mediation often involves the negotiation between converging interests or claims over contested resources. Effective mediation is particularly important for fair conflict resolution and requires agents to assume uninterested positions. Although complete objectivity is hardly plausible given that anyone involved in a conflict has stakes (of their own or their constituency) they could potentially lose, certain individuals do appear more capable at mediating or have particular privileges that allow for alternative perspectives on a conflict which incorporate collective interests. Bennet et al (2001, 374) state that '[...] to manage or resolve conflicts in tropical fisheries will depend upon managers being able to (a) distinguish between positive or negative conflict; (b) determine the root cause of the conflict and tackle that issue first and (c) strengthen the capacity of local institutions to manage conflict, preferably in cooperation with government'. The Kei Islands case study indeed shows that managers, as agents, play an important ground-level role in terms of mediation. More importantly, however, these individuals and the projects they manage are also highly embedded in, and thus an integral part of, the socio-political landscape, as opposed to being neutral, objective or somewhat 'separate'.

Much contemporary collaboration between marine conservation NGOs and communities in eastern Indonesia align with co-management principles, largely following the recognition that '[...] new institutional arrangements, such as the use of collaborative and community-based management approaches, are showing potential for intervening on the negative feedback cycle of "fish wars" by reducing user conflicts while also addressing fisheries sustainability and food security needs' (Pomeroy et al. 2007, 647). In their examination of conflict in fisheries throughout Southeast Asia Pomeroy et al. (2007, 649) also note that 'significant determinants of resource conflict in Indonesia include socioeconomic stratification, peace and order (counter-intuitively, positive), high percentage of income from fishing, and good resource conditions, as well as high levels of village level conflict and the absence of co-management'. It may come as no surprise that conflict over marine resources and tenure rights is common in eastern Indonesia, particularly so in the Kei Islands (Thorburn 2000a, 2000b, 2008; Yamazaki et al. 2015). Contesting the often very vague boundaries marking marine areas belonging to a village or a group of villages is a source of recurring conflict in Kei and involve highly politicised negotiations. As Adhuri (2013, 1) explains in his ethnography of contest over resources in Dullah Laut in the Kei Islands, 'communal marine tenure is a complex phenomenon that concerns the relationship between humans and their marine environment and the relationship between groups where it is used as an instrument for political positioning of entities within and between communities'. Present-day customary law of *adat* practices regarding the marine resources of the Kei Islands are thus largely a result of a long history of contestation over marine resources (Adhuri 1998; Laksono 2002; Rahail 2000; Thorburn 2008).

Bennet et al (2001, 396) provide a useful typology of tropical fisheries related conflicts (Table 1) to be used in contextualising the conflicts discussed in our case study. Although these typologies suggest distinct categories, in practice a particular conflict may relate to several typologies, or at least build onto a previous conflict that may be of another type. A conflict should therefore not be regarded as a singular event but rather, as our cases will show, as a multiple-event built upon memories and outcomes of past conflicts.

We will discuss two conflicts; conflict case I aligns most with a Type IV conflict of Bennet et al. (2001), where the implementing agency's collaboration with KK-1 features centrally and involves different users of the environment, like conservation versus fishing. Conflict case II initially involves aspects of Type I, II and II when the conflict emerged among horizontal tensions, but later involves Type IV and V conflicts when it developed further into vertical conflicts between community and NGO.

Type I	Type II	Type III	Type IV	Type V
KK-1's control over the fishery	How the fishery is controlled	Relations between fishery users	Relations between fishers and other users of the aquatic environment	Relationship between fishery and non-fishery issues
<i>Access issues</i>	<i>Issues of</i> - <i>enforcement</i> - <i>quota allocation</i> - <i>co-management</i>	<i>Issues between different groups (KK-1 and KK-2).</i>	<i>Issues between interest of local village clusters and interest of conservation</i>	<i>Issues over</i> - <i>environment</i> - <i>local politics</i> - <i>elites</i> - <i>corruption</i>

Table 1: Typology of fishery conflicts involved in the case study (Adapted from Bennett et al. 2001, 396).

In choosing cases of conflict over access to marine resources to illustrate responses and various mediating capacities of local actors, we acknowledge the highly contextual nature of conflict. It is not our intention to compare the conflicts per se, but rather to illustrate how shocks differently affect actors' relationships, and how mediating mechanisms that effectively or ineffectively reconcile conflict in turn influence conservation outcomes. Therefore, we argue that a particularly strong case can be made for practitioners to put

priority on understanding social relations (horizontally: within and across communities, and vertically: between communities and external agencies) and to acknowledge their importance in providing potential for progress through rearrangements of governance structures. Adhuri (2013, 2) states that ‘an understanding of how people perceive and practice traditional marine tenure should reflect the community social structure and in particular demonstrate the importance of “power play” in determining marine tenure and management practice’. We thus regard conflicts not necessarily as destructive but also potentially progressive. Examining the conflict case studies warrants a deeper understanding of the socio-political context of Kei society, which is marked by three distinct social strata: descendants of early migrants who brought law and order to Kei (*mel-mel*), descendants of the autochthonous inhabitants of Kei (*ren-ren*), and descendants of slave groups from early tribal warfare (*iri-iri*) (Adhuri 2006; Laksono 2000). Land and marine tenure rights are the prerogative of *ren-ren*, while rights to rule over social order and customary law fall to *mel-mel*. Although the hierarchal order between these two groups varies depending on the context of discussion, *iri-iri* clearly falls to a lower strata. Their access rights to territory for example are often determined through traditional arrangements with *ren-ren* groups, while other social laws maintained through *mel-mel* prohibit them from inter-strata marriage. The extent of social stratification within Kei communities varies, although even today particular leadership roles bestowed on individuals often still show links to hereditary leadership positions in the past.

The Kei Islands social history still reflects in today’s governance, despite ‘new’ village governing apparatus enacting central Indonesian law and legislation since the 1950s. Land and marine tenure at communal level for example remains embedded in traditional arrangements stipulating ownership over a territory or estate (*petuanan*), often under authority of the *ren-ren* lord of the land (*tuan tan*) in a community. Access to a communal marine territory (*petuanan laut*) is determined by one’s association with the recognised rightful owner-group, which may range from a particular social group to Kei society as a whole (Adhuri 2004, 13). KK-1 and KK-2 hold communal custodianship over their respective coastal foreshore marine areas through what is recognised as a property right (*hak milik*), which grants user access to community members and allows traditional community leaders to allocate rights for user access to others (including outsiders). Access to others is granted by permission on the basis of a generic principle that everyone has the ‘right to eat’ (*hak makan*). According to the kind of permission granted, the level of access may vary in how long access is granted and what may be harvested, where, and how. It is within this socio-political landscape of order – that now also includes village government apparatus – that legitimacy of ownership and leadership strongly influences how conflicts evolve and are resolved in contemporary governance contexts (Adhuri 2004).

Recent Marine Conservation History in KK-1

KK-1 is located on Kei Kecil Island, one of the two largest islands in the Kei Archipelago¹ (Figure 1), and is administered under the Southeast Maluku district (*kabupaten*). KK-1 counts just over 560 people distributed among about 120 households and is substantially smaller than its closely neighbouring village; KK-2, which is the administrative subdistrict centre. Whereas KK-2 is mainly Protestant, KK-1 is largely Catholic. Many of the villagers of KK-1 make use of services based in the larger KK-2, such as schooling up to secondary school as well as health care in the form of a public health centre with doctor.

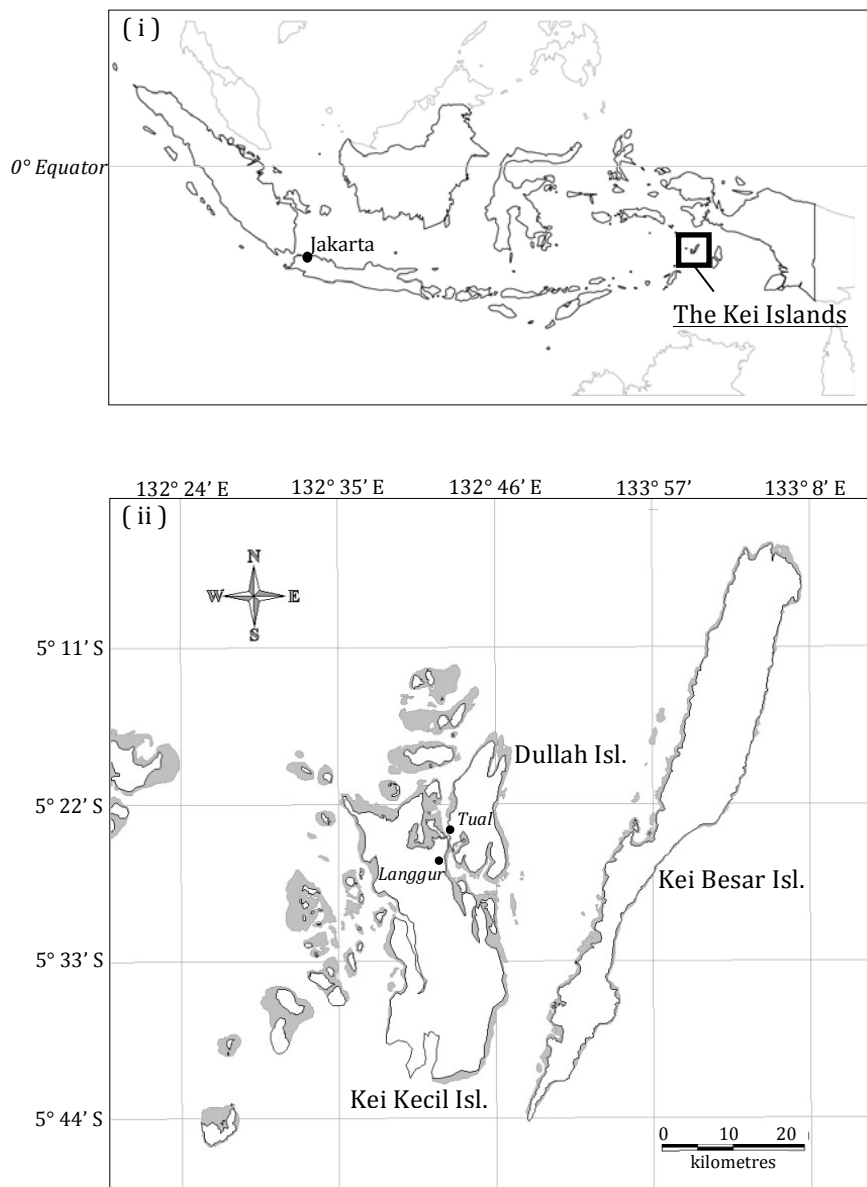


Figure 1: Maps of (i) Indonesia and (ii) the Kei Islands (Adapted from Steenbergen 2013).

¹ The other main island being Kei Besar, located to the east of Kei Kecil.

Three formal governing bodies (*tokoh*) function in the village as a result of an implemented centralised government structure, whereby village government administration operates in tandem with a traditional council (*tokoh adat*) and a church council (*tokoh agama*). The customary (*adat*) village social structure in KK-1 is made up of five main families (*marga*). Although the role *adat* structures play in local decision-making has reportedly decreased significantly, these family groups still play pivotal roles in local governance.

Despite a high dependence on marine resources in the past, more recently the local household economy has shifted away from marine resources making marine-based activities a peripheral income source today. During fieldwork only four households still largely depended on marine resources through fishing and reef gleaning. In the past abundant populations of trochus shell and sea cucumber reportedly inhabited the shallow foreshore in front of the village and sustained household livelihoods. These populations dwindled during the 1990s in the face of unsustainable harvesting, driven by infiltrating market forces. At the time of fieldwork sea cucumber populations had recovered somewhat, as a result of conservation management interventions, and thus was supporting periodic trade again. Managed through a system of periodically harvested marine areas following principles of *sasi*,² and with the facilitation of the partner NGO, sea cucumber had started providing significant collective income for the village. This income was primarily used to fund public interests, like the construction of the church.

The start of more consolidated conservation interventions in KK-1 coincided with a surge in NGO involvement across the Kei Islands towards the end of the 1990s following national aid initiatives to bolster village level development. Rapid rural appraisals had been carried out by different groups, however often without substantive follow-up. Amongst villagers NGOs gradually gained a reputation as self-profiting agencies that typically showed initial enthusiasm, only to abandon their assurances to the community once project proposals were accepted and funds were allocated. Community-wide fatigue for NGO involvement grew and led to the denial for further NGO proposal offers by the village government at the time. As the KK-1 village head noted,

‘I told the others [other NGOs seeking to initiate community programs after 2002], “You want data from the village? People have collected our data 20 times already, ask them for the data, get the funds and then come talk to us, we have given so much already without any return”’ (KK-1 village head 07-02- 2011).

² *Sasi* is still commonly practiced amongst coastal communities in eastern Indonesia. The institution of *sasi* refers to a set of customary rules and norms stipulating how both terrestrial and marine natural resources are managed. It often involves access restrictions being placed on an area or particular resource for a nominated time period. *Sasi* applications vary widely depending on (i) who the restrictor is (whether private or public), (ii) what the reason for the restriction is (economic or social motivation), (iii) how long the restriction is in place (predominantly restricted access with short harvesting periods or predominantly open access with occasional short restriction periods) or (iv) whether it forms part of a harvesting system (cyclical/repetitive system of opening and closure) (Satria and Adhuri 2010; Zerner 1994; Novaczek et al. 2001; Thorburn 2000a; Cohen and Steenbergen 2015).

Several years later a new conservation program was initiated in the area, driven forward by an ‘international conservation NGO’. The implementation for this program in the Kei Islands was bestowed to the ‘implementing agency’, an Indonesian NGO with considerable experience in technical marine conservation in eastern Indonesia. The program applied an icon-species conservation strategy, with a focus on the leatherback turtle because of its significance in local folklore and because the Kei islands form important feeding grounds on their migration path. To establish effective governance practices, the program intended to build on the customary associations Kei culture has with the leatherback, and in doing so revive traditional inter-communal governance structures, known locally as *ratskap*.³ The program commenced in 2004 with initial enthusiasm amongst village leaders following socialisation meetings with the traditional councils of the nine *ratskap* villages, five of which are located on the main island of Kei Kecil with the remaining on the outer southwestern islands. Its first phase involved baseline data collection and set up of community-based management structures. The implementing agency established its base of operations in KK-1, and for this constructed an office and accommodation for their staff. A year into the program the implementing agency invited the partner NGO to lead the community engagement component of the program by establishing projects addressing social and economic objectives under the program (Figure 2). The partner NGO had gained effective community engagement in its work elsewhere in eastern Indonesia and was to apply this same approach to develop effective community involvement amongst the nine *ratskap* villages in the program. Although nine villages participated in the wider program, the community engagement component under responsibility of the partner NGO focused on two villages, KK-1 and KK-2, to establish solid community-based programs there, with longer term plans to upscale those to include all nine villages in latter phases of the program.

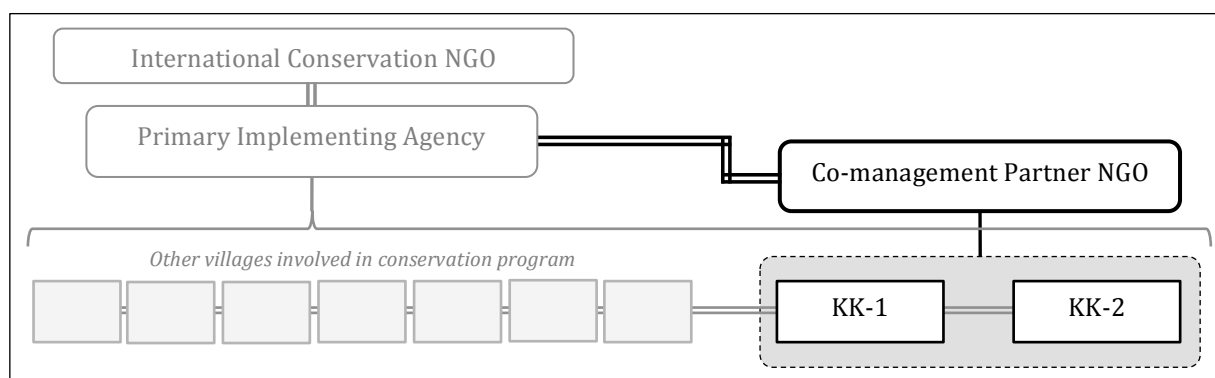


Figure 2: Schematic overview of organisational arrangement of actors in the case study

³ Villages in the Kei Islands fall under respective *ratskap* or ‘*kingships*’, which may be made up of 5 to 10 villages. The term *ratskap* originates from the Dutch colonial administration, in which this formed the lowest inter-village governing structure. At the time these administrative structures formalised existing customary governance arrangements amongst sets of villages known as ‘*utan*’, that were under the rule of a ‘king’ (*raja*). During Indonesia’s New Order government *ratskap* structures were replaced by central state administrative bodies, including in order of scale: national, provincial, district, subdistrict and village administrations.

The implementing agency maintained its focus on leatherback turtle conservation as a means to ultimately develop a marine protected area (MPA). Preliminary delineations of this MPA were based on available distribution data of leatherback turtle, and on first rounds of community consultations carried out by the implementing agency’s staff during the initial inception of the program. The partner NGO’s work in KK-1 and KK-2 on the other hand focused initial efforts on developing sustainable sources for alternative livelihoods, through *sasi* management of sea cucumber (*teripang*) and on establishing community-based conservation management frameworks. The different streams of the umbrella program increasingly came to operate independently as a consequence of the significantly different project approaches between the implementing agency and the partner NGO. As the conflict cases will illustrate, the implementing agency would later withdraw its field office from KK-1 following rising tensions between its team and the *ratskap* community leaders (conflict I). Despite promising results from the community engagement component in the first four years of operation of the partner NGO, a year after the implementing agency left, it too would quite suddenly terminate its activities in KK-1 (conflict II). During the time of fieldwork in 2011 and 2013, neither KK-1 nor KK-2 were collaborating with any of the external conservation groups.

Conflicts over Resource Access in KK-1

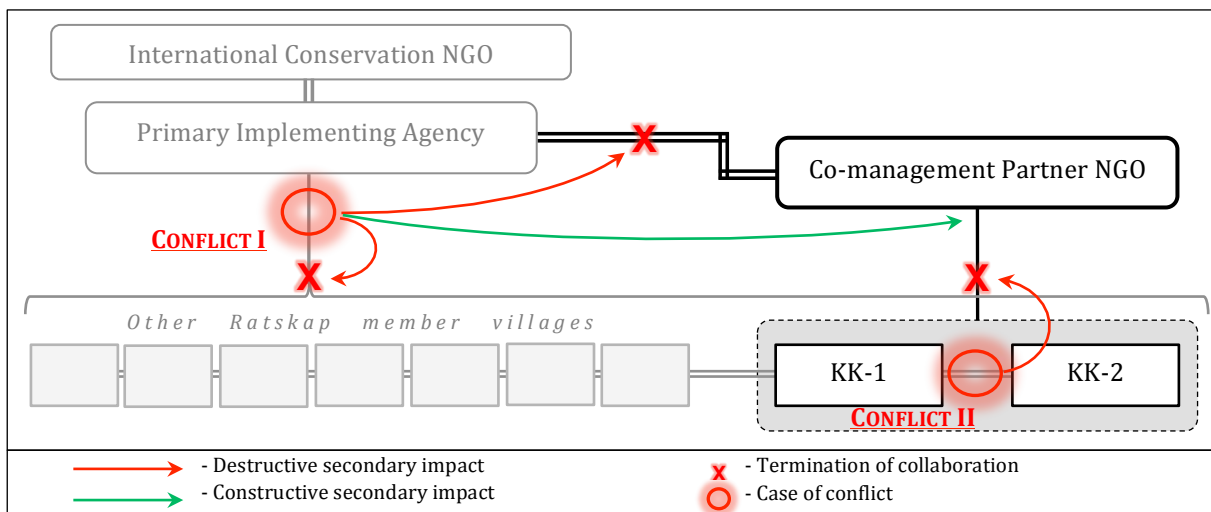


Figure 3: Schematic overview of conflicts that ensued at particular points of collaboration.

The conflicts in KK-1 discussed here occurred between 2008 and 2010. The case of conflict I occurred in 2009 between KK-1 and the implementing agency, which had a field office in

KK-1 at the time but was working mostly external to the village to develop a marine and turtle conservation program with the *ratskap* member villages located on outer the islands, closer to turtle feeding grounds. The conflict here resulted from escalating dissatisfaction amongst KK-1 villagers of the implementing agency's mode of operation in the community. Conflict II started in 2010 and initially involved KK-1 and its neighbouring village KK-2, which is also the sub-district's administrative centre. This conflict later expanded to prominently include the partner NGO. For both conflict cases, attention is given to how these positively or negatively impacted the various collaborative links (Figure 3), with particular focus on the partner NGO's position in relation to KK-1.

Conflict I – Between KK-1 and the Implementing Agency

The growing discontent among KK-1 villagers towards the mode of operation of the implementing agency's coordinating team, ultimately led to the implementing agency's exit from KK-1 in 2009. Initially the program started with much enthusiasm, not only because there was promise of substantial support through links the implementing agency had with the international conservation NGO, but also because the revival of *adat* was advocated to be a primary objective. As a result, through the first phase of the program the community readily collaborated in various fact-finding appraisals and baseline data collection activities. The implementing agency's team, made up of a group of Ambonese conservation staff, established their field office in KK-1. This meant the community engaged quite regularly with the project team.

At the beginning of 2005, however, a year after the umbrella program's initiation, the first tensions were reportedly surfacing. There had been a stark difference in perception on how collaboration with the community should proceed. The implementing agency had started the initial phase with a work plan from which it did not deviate. Although there had been no opposition to the inception strategy, involving the collection of baseline data, many of the villagers recalled that the approach taken by the implementing agency was very 'un-Kei' in its narrow focus on a single species and its business-like, foreign approach. In contrast, establishing personal bonds and trust before proceeding with project tasks was an important local priority. One respondent noted:

'the [implementing agency's] team were only there for the job. They were not interested in getting to know us. [...] For us it is important to know people first before we work with them; but the project was more important for them' (KK-1 villager, 07-02-2011).

The invitation of the partner NGO to collaborate in the program was in part a response to these early tensions, whereby the partner NGO's community approach that had proven successful in other eastern Indonesian sites was seen as key to resolving them. Although respondents reported that the partner NGO's involvement had worked well to engage the

community more directly in conservation management interventions, they often added that this engagement developed specifically around the relationship between the community and the partner NGO. The implementing agency's team, which remained concentrated on developing their icon-species oriented conservation plan, had meanwhile increasingly distanced itself from KK-1. Their focus on developing a proposal for an MPA (*Kawasan Konservasi Laut, KKL*) spanning the waters across the joint *ratskap* territory meant that time and resources were spent mostly delineating marine zones away from KK-1, distancing the implementing agency further from KK-1. No KK-1 community member was involved in the implementing agency's regular outreach programs. One of the community conservation team⁴ members from KK-1 noted that:

‘it seemed the money of the project was intended for the [the implementing agency's] team to carry out their own activities and not for the communities [...] there was nothing happening for us there, just a lot of talk about establishing a protected area’ (KK-1 Community conservation team member, 06-02-2011).

Rather than being a significant focus of their operations, KK-1 gradually had become a base to which the implementing agency's team would return to from duties elsewhere. With their increasing engagement in outreach activities it became less clear to community members in KK-1 what exactly they were achieving. In reflecting on this conflict with people during my visit to the community in 2011, many respondents independently spoke of a growing divide, compounded by ethnic differences between the Keiese and the Ambonese implementing agency's team.⁵ The divide between the implementing agency and the KK-1 community had become wider as focus intensified on developing an MPA as part of the International NGO's primary objective. Respondents frequently noted that KK-1 villagers at the time felt they were serving the implementing agency's team, rather than the implementing agency supporting community needs;

‘they [the implementing agency] came here in order to help us [KK-1 community] with conservation and to help us to manage *sasi laut*. But it was not like that – we were taking care of them so that they could do their work, not ours’ (KK-1 community leader, 09-02-2011).

This tension reached a critical point towards the end of 2009 when the implementing agency hosted a foreign expedition team as part of their larger regional conservation tour. Their visit

⁴ This team of community members was formed later in collaborations with the partner NGO.

⁵ Amongst communities in Kei perceptions about ‘*anak-anak Ambon*’ (‘Ambon's children’, referring to Ambonese) are rooted in the historical relationship they share as remote, *adat*-oriented Kei islanders with modern ‘city-folk’ from Ambon. Ambonese would often be associated with modernity, in both negative and positive senses, depending on the context of discussion.

coincided with jelly fish blooms that trigger seasonal feeding congregations of the leatherback turtles. Coordinated through the international conservation NGO with the aim to develop awareness of various conservation priorities across eastern Indonesia, the expedition team reportedly engaged only marginally with communities during their visit. According to respondents, community members felt insufficiently consulted about the objective of the expedition, questioning its direct contribution to achieving conservation goals around their village.

When the expedition concluded and the visitors had left, the implementing agency's team was met with hostility in KK-1. In the following days a meeting took place in the village with the implementing agency's team, the village head and the community conservation team. The village representatives at the meeting voiced their concern regarding the lack of collaborative spirit between the implementing agency and the community, and the lack of results despite the efforts of the community. By the end of the meeting the collaboration between the community and the implementing agency was terminated.⁶

Rearrangements Following the Implementing Agency's Departure

Meanwhile, the partner NGO's program had closely aligned itself with KK-1. Throughout the build-up of tension until the final departure of the implementing agency, the partner NGO had maintained strong collaboration with the community through their project staff. In fact the ongoing tensions between KK-1 and the implementing agency had intensified the partner NGO's collaboration with KK-1. Respondents revealed that the partner NGO's primary objective to jointly develop sustainable means to gain benefit from marine resources had become more appealing to the community than the implementing agency's objective to develop its conservation framework around the leatherback turtle. The partner NGO had invested in strengthening key links within the community through individuals like the village head, the head of school and influential youth leaders around whom the program became established. They eventually developed a closer alliance with the community than with the implementing agency. One of the partner NGO staff noted that the local criticism on the implementing agency's team had formed an important feedback mechanism for them to avoid similar mistakes. From the community's perspective, the use of the partner NGO team as a sounding board to voice criticism about the implementing agency had become a way in which community members could communicate expectations without having to address them directly and risk undermining their partnership. The growing antagonism of the community

⁶ During my fieldwork visit in 2011 the village office was no longer in use. Continuing their ground level appraisals to establish an MPA around the seasonal leatherback turtle feeding ground was reportedly made difficult in all villages following their departure from KK-1. Consequently, the international conservation NGO re-strategised to concentrate on applying the data gained thus far to muster the necessary political support at district level for the establishment of an MPA. A preliminary proposal was put forward to the district level Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries (MMAF) in 2010, however community leaders appeared to be unaware in 2011 of any formal MPA proposal.

towards the implementing agency thus formed an accepted way to communicate and share their expectations about NGO collaboration without the need to confront them directly.

In this process, the partner NGO's director actively distanced their program from the implementing agency. They had not intervened to try to mitigate the growing tensions between the community and the implementing agency. Instead, their priority to maintain strong links with the community as the primary means to achieve conservation outcomes had meant that collaborative links with other institutions, which would interfere with this priority, were avoided. The conflict thus led to the severing of the implementing agency's ties with both KK-1 and the partner NGO, while inadvertently strengthening the collaboration between the KK-1 and the partner NGO (Figure 3).

Conflict II – Inter-communal Tensions and the Partner NGO's Withdrawal

In April 2010, KK-1 and KK-2 (the subdistrict's administrative centre) fell into conflict after KK-2 leaders permitted outside fishers to harvest sea cucumber in their *sasi* area. The partner NGO's support to KK-1 and KK-2 had led to the implementation of managed sea cucumber cultivation programs in both villages that drew from existing *sasi* traditions. To govern this, sets of village resource use regulations had been formulated in each village with facilitation by the partner NGO. Although reflective of *adat* principles, with formal recognition from subdistrict authority, these regulations became part of official village government (*dinas*) rule. The regulations had been successfully applied on several occasions involving earlier smaller increments by outside fishers onto KK-1 and KK-2 fisheries areas, however the attempted application of them during this particular conflict failed. The partner NGO's prominent role in facilitating the formulation of them meant it was positioned into a mediating role early on in the conflict. Figure 4 shows the sequence of events that led, firstly, to nullification the village resource use regulations by the new subdistrict head and, later, to a shift in focus of the conflict that made the partner NGO the subject of the conflict.

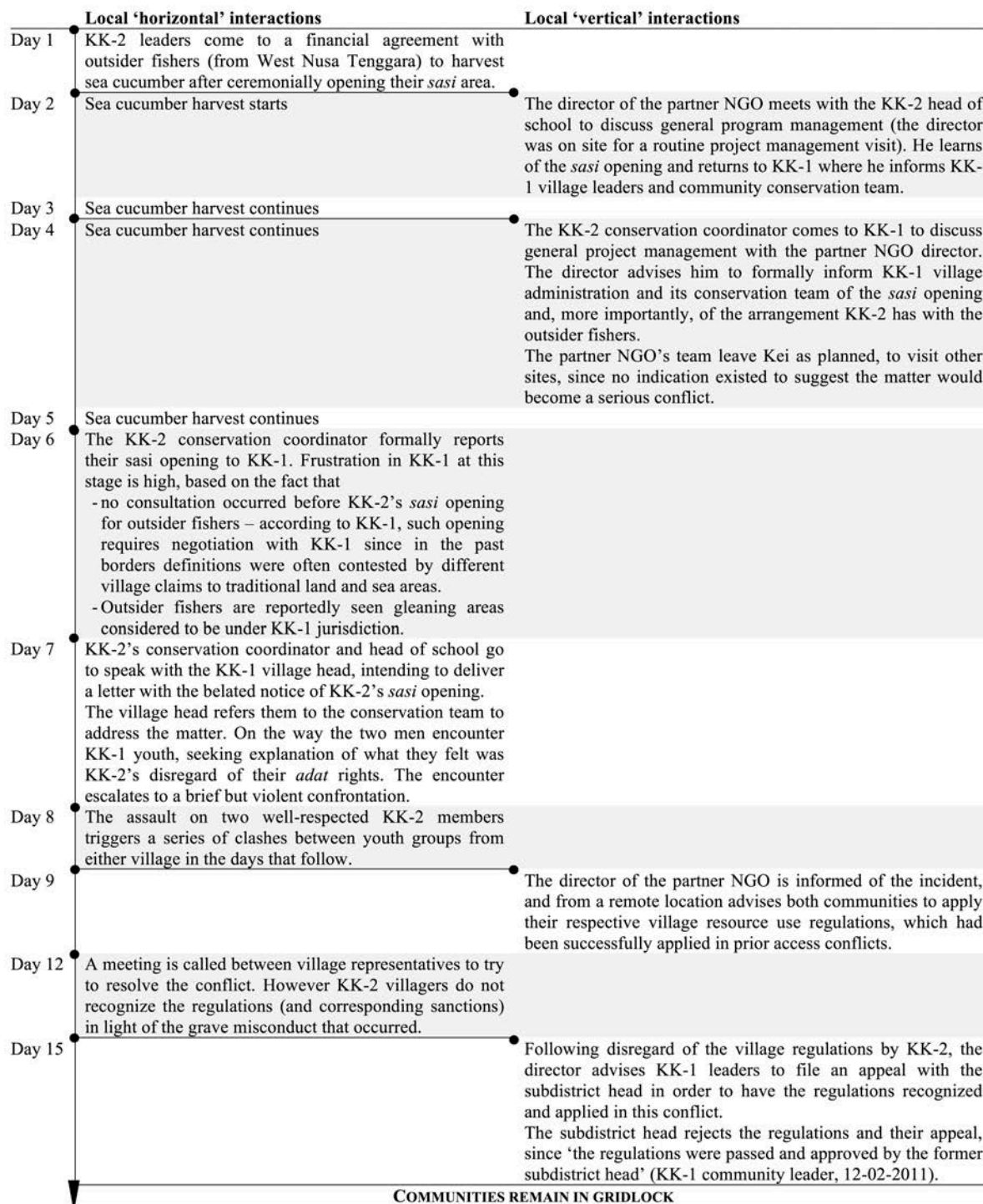


Figure 4 : Sequence of events in the development of conflict II.

Some respondents from KK-1 explained the subdistrict head's reluctance to acknowledge KK-1's resource use regulations by virtue of the fact that he was of a lower caste in Kei society and one of only a few in a leading government position. In order to counter status prejudice he had been known to assert his power irrespective of past agreements between government and members of the higher caste. Others claimed he had responded negatively following a past dispute with his predecessor over his appointment as subdistrict head, thus refusing to recognise what his predecessor had instituted. Another common explanation among respondents was that he was reluctant to side with KK-1 village regulations, since he resided in KK-2. His political position required him to maintain a strong support base in the subdistrict capital KK-2; so opposing his main constituency would be political suicide. Irrespective of personal or political interests swaying his decision, the fact that the subdistrict head had used his mandate to discredit the village resource use regulations indicates that these were not immune to changes in the political landscape.

As the conflict continued without resolution following the refuting response from the subdistrict head, tension remained between the two villages. Subsequent attempts towards resolution remained fruitless and rumours grew of the roles of certain individuals in the conflict. For example, the partner NGO's advice to KK-1 to apply the village regulations was interpreted by KK-2 as preferential treatment towards KK-1 over KK-2. But in KK-1 the partner NGO's involvement also came under scrutiny. At another village meeting in KK-1 public accusations were made over the lack of action from the partner NGO in a matter that was regarded largely the responsibility of the NGO. Amongst the different opposing parties the partner NGO, personified in its director, was increasingly positioned at the centre of the conflict, although opinions about these accusations differed among the different community groups in KK-1.⁷ The community conservation team, for example, ascribed the conflict's escalation to the passiveness and lack of leadership of the KK-1 village head in the face of the subdistrict head's dismissal of village regulations, rather than blaming the partner NGO. The village head's apprehension to take action against the subdistrict head had been interpreted by the community conservation team as placing his own political interests before the community's interests.

In an attempt to lay the conflict to rest the village head of KK-1 contacted the director of the partner NGO and suggested he provide the necessary funds to supply KK-2 with an antique canon (*lela*). KK-2 would then ceremonially hand over the canon to KK-1 village as a public gesture to bring closure to the conflict. Claimed by the KK-1 village head as the traditional way to go about resolving a conflict of this nature, the director considered the proposal. He consulted two of his local Kei advisors with whom he had maintained frequent contact throughout the developments in KK-2 and KK-1. Both sources contested that Kei custom dictated such a resolution for such a conflict, nor was there any evidence of other inter-village

⁷ In KK-1, the factional divisions among community groups are complex and dynamic, with outside (social, political and economic) distortions shifting the boundaries of factions. A main factional division at the time of the research in 2011 was determined by the extent of people's association with central government institutions. One faction opposed central government rule by asserting themselves on most fronts against village government, while members from the other faction aligned themselves either through their job or other close involvement in local formal government structures.

conflicts in the past having been reconciled in this way. The director was advised that accepting such a resolution could be interpreted by the broader KK-1 and KK-2 village communities as confirmation of rumours of the NGO's instigating role in the conflict. As a result the director refused the proposal by the KK-1 village head.

After a month had passed without resolution, the partner NGO pulled out of both KK-1 and KK-2. In May 2010 the director of the partner NGO sent a set of identical letters, addressed to the respective village heads, conservation teams and traditional council heads of the two villages. In the letters he explained the partner NGO's perspective on the events and informed them that the program would temporarily withdraw for as long as the different governing bodies could not find common ground.

Letters from the partner NGO

The seven page letter to local leaders begins with a brief history of the partner NGO's program in the villages, followed by a section highlighting its main successes. The list particularly mentions the increased sea cucumber harvests following management interventions, the establishment of the community conservation team, the formulation of village resource use regulations, the success of the environmental education program, and increased management skills among villagers. In this section a reference is made to how the program had increased the profile of the villages mentioning that prior to the partner NGO's intervention they had been 'unknown'; but had since gained a fine reputation in public media for their conservation success.

The letter continues with an analysis from the partner NGO's perspective on the conflict. The antique canon payment is questioned in the letter, whereby the director underlines his confusion why such a payment had been requested since *sasi* violations in the past had never required such payment. He continues by accentuating his view on what was the core of the conflict, namely critical communication problems between the governing conservation bodies in the villages including the youth conservation teams and the conservation coordinators from each village. He specifically notes three critical points in the run up to the conflict that if approached differently could have prevented an escalation; (i) '[...] if only the information I [the director] provided to the KK-1 village head and the conservation team was responded to proactively', (ii) '[...] if only the KK-2 conservation coordinator had prepared the letter sooner, as according to my [the director] recommendation', and (iii) '[...] if only the KK-1 village head had accepted the report from the KK-2 conservation coordinator and head of school [instead of referring them to the conservation team on the day of the encounter with KK-1 youth]'⁸. The letter then proceeds with the partner NGO's formal resignation from KK-1. Striking here are the aggressive arguments emphasizing KK-1's bad track record in collaborating with external groups (following the implementing agency's withdrawal a year earlier) and the partner NGO's strength as a well-connected NGO. The letters remark that

⁸ This reference is extracted from the withdrawal letter from the partner NGO addressed to KK-1. Due to confidentiality agreements with all respondents to maintain anonymity, the full reference is omitted.

with many of the partner NGO's other project sites functioning well, it did not stand to lose anything by withdrawing from KK-1:

‘As long as there is no harmony between the village head, the conservation team and the community in managing village activities, my [the director] feeling is that there is no organisation that would want to work with KK-1 [...] In the last four years, the three organisations that collaborated with KK-1 have all resigned’⁸

Following the first set of letters addressed to the respective villages, the director sent a second set of letters a few days later addressed to the subdistrict head and the head of the police department (with copies sent to the two village heads). This letter stipulates their perceived position in the conflict and confirms the partner NGO's withdrawal from KK-1 and KK-2. This letter mirrors much of what was noted in the first set of letters, but concludes with a final section emphasizing this NGO's commitment to support communities in sustainably managing marine resources for the future and again stresses its extensive network of ongoing successful community sites beyond KK-1 and KK-2;

‘[the partner NGO] continually motivates and supports communities in eastern Indonesia to manage specifically marine resources in order to profit from them without destroying them. [...] the partner NGO's] resignation from KK-1 will not affect us [the partner NGO], because [the partner NGO] has forty-nine other sites in Indonesia. [...] Losing one site will not have a big impact on the national program’⁹

In recalling events more than year after these incidents during fieldwork, respondents noted that after the partner NGO's withdrawal the conflict between KK-2 and KK-1 came to a quiet conclusion. A small ceremony was reportedly held at which the KK-2 village council handed over an antique canon to the village head of KK-1. Several key informants from KK-1 regarded the ceremony as an exercise by the village head to save face. The traditional elder who normally would facilitate such ceremonies had allegedly refused to administer this ceremony, since the antique canon in question was believed to have been provided by the KK-1 village head and given to the KK-2 council, so that it could be returned during a public ceremony as a token gesture for reconciliation.

This conclusion certainly did not bring an end to the divisions that emerged among governing bodies in KK-1. During fieldwork in 2011, the opposing factions to the KK-1 village government were still awaiting village elections, so no real change could be expected. According to the former coordinator of the community conservation team and several of its

⁹ This reference is extracted from the resignation letter of the partner NGO addressed to the subdistrict head. Due to confidentiality agreements with all respondents to maintain anonymity, the full reference is omitted.

members, only a new village head from a different faction could be expected to re-engage with the partner NGO again in the future.

NGO Dependence on Local Socio-Political Dynamics

The partner NGO's resignation from both conservation sites, communicated through the director's formal letters, exhibited a failure to adapt its engagement in the face of shifts in local socio-political relationships. Despite (or arguably because of) significant investments in developing particular close relationships in the community, through its community-based approach, the partner NGO was unable to positively engage when factional change occurred. There are two dimensions to the partner NGO's approach in KK-1 that warrant more attention in this discussion; namely its reliance on personal ties with particular individuals in the community to gain and maintain support, and the ironic consequence of this being the loss of its neutrality as a 'mediator' in a conflict that emerged between communities.

Instituted management mechanisms like the village government resource use regulations were implemented to function as an appropriate governing tool to address highly contested claims over resources. Conflict II however shows that the partner NGO's assumption that the village resource use regulations would form an apolitical mechanism strong enough to address critical issues of resource conflict was flawed. Although these regulations drew from *sasi-adat* principles, they extended from official administrative village government and thus remained perceived by community members as, at least partially, a foreign product formatted through the facilitation of the partner NGO. This was evident in the way KK-1 leaders used the regulations in earlier apprehensions of illegal fishers. Leaders noted that sanctions were rarely put forward as dictated in the regulations, nor were they consistently applied to all perpetrators. Instead, sanctions appeared fluid and negotiable according to critical social (*adat*) connections and values connecting the perpetrators and the prosecutors. In the second case of KK-1 versus KK-2, where both villages had resource use regulations in place, their application was apparently ineffective. Compounded primarily by the subdistrict head's disregard of them, the regulations could play no further role in conflict resolution. The affectivity and formal recognition of the village regulations clearly hinged on a particular socio-political milieu. Administrative change at village and sub-district levels over time meant their application lost traction, indicating that the resource use regulations were by no means apolitical.

Besides considering the context in which the village government resource use regulations were applied, it is important also to consider the perceived local value of these regulations relative to other existing rules, value and norms. The regulations appeared useful in resolving conflict issues up to a certain degree of severity and within certain contexts, however they became void where grave *adat* violations occurred and political risks were involved. The relative ease with which local actors dismissed the regulations in the course of conflict II indicates that they remained clearly subordinate to older more institutionalised hierarchies and traditional rules of engagement in Kei's social context. The partner NGO's confidence in

the resource use regulations, apparent in the director's persistent reference to them to resolve the conflict in the early stages of conflict II, in fact resulted in a backlash response by KK-2 towards the NGO, which was seen as showing preferential treatment to KK-1.

The partner NGO's vulnerability in its dependence on particular social connections into the community is also highlighted in this conflict II case. Through the social investments of the partner NGO in relationships with key figures in the communities, the program had been able to gain a strong initial foothold. Although effective in gaining collaboration, their involvement also meant they had to align with the hierarchical social structure that was in place under a particular factional arrangement at a particular period in time. Such hierarchical arrangements, however, are highly volatile and when changes occur, like with KK-1's conflict with KK-2, the partner NGO remained dependent on connections to specific members or factions that had become compromised within the wider community. In KK-1 for example, the partner NGO lost significant credibility within the community by being too closely associated with the village head. Once community groups turned against the village head it jeopardised the partner NGO's position. The alternative links the partner NGO had developed within the community (apart from the village head), although strong, had been with individuals who did not have enough authority to withstand the shifts in village politics. Unfortunately there was insufficient local institutional presence in the form of, for example 'impersonal' rules of engagement to complement the dependence on personal ties that had severed. Ultimately, the inability to overcome conflict and adapt management practices to address socio-political shifts that would retain all parties in a sufficiently legitimate status to continue collaboration, meant the termination of the collaboration.

Conclusion

Our analysis focuses on two conflict cases; one between a coastal community (KK-1) and an NGO (the implementing agency), and the other between this community and its neighbour (KK-2) which later also involved an NGO (the partner NGO). Both cases highlight the dilemma experienced by many external organisations involved in co-management partnerships with communities, namely the dilemma of becoming closely involved with a community and the need to simultaneously avoid dependence on the power position of their partners within that community. Evidently conservation and resource management conflicts do not stand alone, as they are built upon the legacy of previous experiences of the collaborating communities. Likewise, present interactions may have an unknown impact on future collaborations. This case study from Kei shows how positions of NGOs in negotiations and through implementation of particular governing tools are strongly subject to local networks and socio-political hierarchies. Although external actors seeking local collaboration in establishing resource use regulations and co-management practices may at times profit from strong local presence, they also risk to lose out on their independence because they are too involved in a particular power arrangement with local actors.

The conflict cases show evidence that significant agency exists amongst local actors to apply various forms of ‘translation’ (Tsing 2005) or ‘cross cultural borrowing’ (Cleaver 2012) across governance regimes so as to make new governing mechanisms locally more applicable, to dismiss perceived illegitimate rules, and to fulfil parallel interests. At the start of the collaboration between the partner NGO and the two communities for example, village government resource use regulations formed a vital tool for the communities to secure political recognition as customary owners over marine areas and to provide legitimacy to deal with resource poachers. The application of these regulations, however, appeared less strict depending on the social relationship of the offender with the community (Gunawan and Visser 2012), and according to the severity of the misconduct. A flexible customary (*adat*) governing context, with its own norms, accountabilities and socio-political arrangements, thus appears to shape the functioning and effectiveness of new, externally facilitated and more rigid governing tools. We have seen how local agency influences the positioning of external actors in negotiations and conflicts, whereby conflict I saw the ousting of the implementing partner NGO after closer ties evolved between KK-1 and the partner NGO, and conflict II saw the partner NGO’s position shift from being a ‘neutral mediating’ actor to becoming a subject involved in a local conflict when intervention by government authorities never eventuated.

The effectiveness of mediating processes, and the tools and actors involved, thus appears conditional. Governing tools like resource use regulations or mediating actors like the partner NGO become vulnerable to dismissal when conflicts escalate beyond their governance capacity. The village government’s resource use regulations consistently appeared subordinate to socio-political hierarchies and customary (*adat*) arrangements between villagers. Being a product of modern government, the village regulations were also strongly subject to political conditions beyond the village. This became evident in conflict II where the regulations were incompatible with shifts in local administrative politics, when the new subdistrict head refused to acknowledge the KK-1 resource use regulations.

Variability in individual mediating capacities was evident in both conflict cases, and probably most striking in the role of the partner NGO’s director. The first conflict case between the implementing agency NGO and KK-1 provided an opportunity for the director of the partner NGO to strengthen links and understanding between his NGO team and KK-1. For a conservation actor working at multiple scales, visibly operating within the smaller social domain of the coastal community was deliberate and worked favourably in the wake of conflict I. However, in the case of conflict II that started between the two communities KK-1 and KK-2, the partner NGO decided not to accept the mediation proposed by the village head of KK-1, leading to the partner NGO’s eventual withdrawal from both KK-1 and KK-2. This decision resulted as much from local actors influencing the positioning of the NGO in the conflict as from the NGO’s own risk management associated with accepting the proposal. According to the partner-NGO director, accepting the proposal would have been synonymous with accepting the accusations and responsibility for the inter-village conflict, thus compromising its legitimacy as a co-management partner to both communities in the future.

The two conflict cases discussed in this article illustrate how the everyday interactions with communities of external co-management partners like conservation NGOs, are significantly affected by the socio-political dynamics and the volatile position of individual local actors in the arena of community-based resource management. Whereas newly introduced governing tools may well bring about change in the way marine resource management is conducted or the way conflicts are resolved, they appear to be effective only insofar as they remain 'fitting' within dynamic local power hierarchies. Similarly, the effectiveness of co-management partnerships between communities and external actors relies on the ability of the partnership to balance a necessarily neutral mediation capacity with dependence on particular local socio-political structures. As a result local dependence may well help to 'get things done' in some contexts and prove to be counter-productive in others.

In addressing how practitioners can manage the dilemma of dependence versus project productivity, the two conflict cases illustrate the need for external NGOs to prioritize understanding local social relations and socio-political hierarchies in which resource management regimes come to function. Appropriate response to power shifts to allow for long term collaboration or efficacy of implemented change requires particular attention to both inert and live political tensions existing between actors within in a community, between communities, and between communities and external organisations. Acknowledging and allowing for participation of contesting, likely less dominant, factions while staying within the boundaries of contemporary community power arrangements, may well provide the necessary flexibility for collaboration at the community-NGO interface. Intervening agencies may benefit from anthropological and political ecology insights, by using this knowledge together with their technical knowledge of resource management, in order to more effectively balance distance and dependence in relations of cooperation with local actors.

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