

# From Donor to *Ndoro*: Donor Neocolonialism, Worker Vulnerability, and Solidarity for the Sustainability of the Indonesian Women's Movement

## Dari Donor ke *Ndoro*: Neokolonialisme Donor, Kerentanan Pekerja, dan Solidaritas bagi Keberlanjutan Gerakan Perempuan Indonesia



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#### ABSTRACT

A donor relationship with civil society organizations (CSOs) is a relationship that is characterized by dependence caused by unequal power relations. This research aims to explore the importance of solidarity in the context of the sustainability of the Indonesian women's movement in the midst of this problem. Unlike previous studies, this study used the practice of vigilant eco-love in analyzing solidarity within the women's movement. In its approach, this study used a reflective thematic analysis method that emphasized themes in qualitative data obtained through semi-structured in-depth interviews. Interview participants were four figures who were significantly involved in the women's movement in Indonesia. This study identifies three themes: 1) donor neo-colonialism within CSO in Indonesia, 2) the vulnerability of CSO workers in sustainability issues, and 3) the importance of vigilant eco-love for sustainable women's movements. The study argues that the vigilant eco-love practice is the key to answering questions regarding the sustainability of the women's movement and the vulnerability of workers amidst the attack of donor neoliberal colonization. Nonetheless, the study has key limitation in the form of limited number of participants. Future studies might benefit from widening the pool of participant to donors and intermediary donors, as well as exploring the aspect of power relations between CSOs and their resources.

#### Kata Kunci

*Neo-Kolonialisme Donor;  
 Kerentanan Pekerja;  
 Gerakan Perempuan;  
 Keberlanjutan; Vigilante  
 Eco-Love;*

#### ABSTRAK

Hubungan donor dengan organisasi masyarakat sipil (CSO) merupakan suatu hubungan yang diwarnai ketergantungan dari relasi kuasa yang timpang. Penelitian ini bertujuan mendalami pentingnya solidaritas dalam lika-liku keberlanjutan gerakan perempuan Indonesia di tengah permasalahan tersebut. Berbeda dengan studi-studi sebelumnya, penelitian ini menggunakan praktik *vigilant eco-love* dalam menganalisis solidaritas yang ada pada gerakan perempuan. Dalam pendekatannya, penelitian ini menggunakan metode *reflective thematic analysis* yang menekankan pada tema-tema dalam data kualitatif yang didapatkan melalui wawancara mendalam semi-terstruktur. Partisipan wawancara adalah 4 figur yang terlibat secara signifikan dalam gerakan perempuan di Indonesia. Penelitian ini mengidentifikasi 3 tema, yaitu: 1) neo-kolonialisme donor dalam CSO di Indonesia, 2) kerentanan buruh CSO dalam permasalahan keberlanjutan, serta 3) pentingnya *vigilant eco-love* untuk gerakan perempuan yang berkelanjutan. Penelitian ini berargumen bahwa praktik *vigilant eco-love* tersebut menjadi kunci untuk menjawab pertanyaan terkait keberlanjutan gerakan perempuan dan kerentanan pekerja di tengah gempuran penjajahan neoliberal donor. Meskipun demikian, penelitian ini memiliki keterbatasan utama dalam bentuk jumlah partisipan yang relatif kecil. Penelitian mendatang dapat mengambil manfaat dengan memperluas jumlah partisipan sampai ke donor dan dono *intermediary*, serta mengeksplorasi aspek relasi kuasa antara CSO dan sumber dayanya.

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## Introduction

Although initially hailed as a stabilizers and defenders of democracy, studies have found that CSOs are usually the consequence of the democracy process and often are influenced by the incumbent regime (Guan, 2005; Lorch & Mauk, 2025). In the context of Indonesia, studies have Civil society organizations (CSOs) in the context of authoritarian governments are often categorized into three types: advocacy non-governmental organizations (NGOs), non-profit service providers, and regime-aligned NGOs (Toepler et al., 2020). Authoritarian regimes focus on CSOs that provide non-profit services and are loyal to the regime, but alienate CSOs that are critical and encourage civil society participation. Yet, the women movement in Indonesia has largely managed to uphold the diagonal accountability and secured human rights reform through the legalization of the Sexual Violence Law in 2022 (Setiawan & Tomsa, 2023).

Support for these advocacy CSOs is often then sought through the presence of foreign aid funds, such as the practices in Indonesia. However, foreign aid is an issue fraught with politics and instability. On January 20, 2025, United States (US) President Donald Trump announced a freeze on USAID (United States Agency for International Development) funding. USAID is the largest humanitarian funding organization that is part of the government and reports directly to the US Secretary of State. The freeze has resulted in many programs and initiatives in countries that rely on USAID funding being forced to suspend activities and lay off their staff. In Southeast Asia, the freeze threatens thousands of lives from vulnerable groups that depend on such funding. With the withdrawal of funding to the KHANA organization in Cambodia, thousands of tuberculosis patients are in danger of not being able to access the medication that they must take every day (Hale & Duangdee, 2025). Humanitarian organizations in the Philippines are also at risk of losing access to HIV drugs and funding for prevention initiatives (ASIAN SOGIE Caucus, 2025).

In its history in Indonesia, USAID has played a role in CSO advocacy in the women's movement. One of them is through the eMpowering Access to Justice (MAJu) program in collaboration with the Ministry of Law and Human Rights (Kementerian Hukum dan Hak Asasi Manusia – Kemenkumham) that was implemented for five years by The Asia Foundation. This program exists to assist the access of vulnerable groups, including women, to the right to justice through legal aid organizations and support to various Indonesian government institutions. The success of MAJu can be seen from its achievements during the program run from 2016 to 2021 including through its support to the Sexual Violence Bill campaigns (Mardatillah, 2021).

Through considerations of its major role within the women movement in Indonesia, the suspension of USAID raises big questions about the sustainability of civil society movements that continue to be haunted by dependence on foreign funding institutions that are largely considered as the major donors to the movement. The role of the donor then also shifts from a supporting third party that should aid the independent movement, to taking away said independence as its ‘master’ or *ndoro* in the Javanese language as mentioned in the title of this article. This term also implies the imperialist position of the foreign donors.

Moreover, this funding practice and the issue of NGO-ization have generated their own discourses. For a long time, many have criticized the modern colonialism engendered by foreign donors. Petras (1999) for example, describes NGO leaders as a new class born not out of ownership of property or resources, but out of imperialist funding and the capacity to control key groups. He criticizes the term NGO to refer to an institution that actually receives funding from foreign governments and business entities. Instead of being a resistance movement for the oppressed, the dynamics of NGOs focus more on a program-to-program basis and become a platform to pursue a career in the international arena.

In post-colonialism studies, NGOs are also criticized as tools of neoliberalism that perpetuate the oppression and structures of underdevelopment experienced by former colonial countries (Sakue-Collins, 2021) NGOs are considered to only focus on problem-solving efforts that do not eradicate the roots of the problem itself. This problem is once again related to the dependence on foreign aid, which is often a scourge for social movements. For the women's movement, NGOization poses threats of depolitization and professionalization that often lead to the dilution of the core feminist values, replicating colonialism through the prioritization of donors’ objectives (Alexander, 2024)

The concern about neo-colonialism in civil society movements in former colonies has been a specific issue and NGOs have often been in the spotlight. Rodríguez (2016) criticized NGOs that he called the “non-profit industrial complex” as an obstacle to social justice, especially in the context of the United States. In this case, NGOs as organizations that receive funding from large corporations and the state become tools for power to continue to dominate the direction and movement of struggles for social justice and are seen as its own industry.

In the African context, studies show that international NGOs work with other western neo-colonial structures to continue exerting influence in developing countries. NGOs participate in strengthening this influence through the creation of structures that reinforce dependency, lack of technological development, and an emphasis on Western agendas and

values (Kilcoyne, 2021). Foreign aid is also susceptible to creating a cycle of imperialism and dependency due to the demand to adapt the donors' cultures and ways of life in order to receive funding (Ashdown et al., 2021). The discussion shows how CSOs that are expected to be agents to fight against social injustice often end up perpetuating oppression.

Naturally, this critique is difficult to generalize to all of civil society, especially in Indonesia. In discussing donor neo-colonialism, it is important to understand the socio-political context of Indonesia and its civil society organizations. The state of democracy in Indonesia is characterized by weak rule of law, deep-rooted corruption, and political violence. The civil society movement in Indonesia in the post-1998 reform context is characterized by bourgeois reformism due to the weakness of the Left and NGO-ization. The weak strength of the civil society movement is illustrated by the weakening of the Corruption Eradication Commission (Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi – KPK), whose hacking was enabled by civil society organizations (Mudhoffir, 2023)

The explanation reveals the complexity of the position of civil society organizations in Indonesia, especially when foreign-funded programs are seen as the way to go in empowering diverse issues and regions. In response to this onslaught of neo-colonialism, women's movements are often associated with an ethic of care and solidarity as a strategy to confront oppression. Women and their marginalized experiences of oppression at the intersections of gender, class and race build sensitivity and care for fellow marginalized groups (Bass, 2009). Care is described as the ability to identify the roots of injustice, the responsibility to act, and the courage to bear the impact of those actions. Through care, women movement often negotiate the overwhelming demand of professionalization that often come with NGOization and create practises to negotiate feminist values and ethics (Chakraborty, 2021).

Specifically, this article uses the concept of vigilant eco-love introduced by Saraswati (2021) in her book *Pain Generation: Social Media, Feminist Activism, and the Neoliberal Selfie*. The concept is conceptualized by Saraswati as a critique and resistance towards the existing neoliberalism within the social movement that is often well internalized within its structure and practices. The concept consists of three main elements, namely: (1) be "vigilant" in our love, (2) be mindful of the well-being of the ecology and the self as part of the ecology, and (3) work toward an end to systematic oppression. This article uses the concept to analyze solidarity beyond the digital space, which also refers to the physical space.

Love is explained as the power to be constantly vigilant for the sake of one another, so this love means doing social justice works and opening space to exist with others. Ecology itself is explained as a system that includes relationships between humans, the environment, and other non-human entities. These entanglements are constructed through institutions, discourses, politics, and ethics embedded in hierarchies of power that regulate access to resources and power. The concept critiques the analysis of resistance that often relies on individual efforts and instead demands a social movement to contest the existing structures (Pasaribu, 2021;Saraswati, 2021).

Using the neo-colonialism critique and vigilant eco-love as a theoretical concept, this article aims to examine the problem of relations between donors and civil society movements, especially in the case of the women's movement, with the following timeframe of the suspension of USAID funding in Indonesia from January 22, 2025. The analysis of the women movement's contestation against the constraining structures must also acknowledge the existence of foreign donors that often control and industrialize the ecology. The term donor is used within this article to refer to foreign funding institutions, such as USAID and the European Commission, that operate within the aid industry in Indonesia, whether through grants to intermediary organizations or direct support to local organizations. Within this article, we position the aid industry, thus the donors, the intermediary organizations, the grassroots CSOs, and the workers within it, as entities whose relations to one another constructed the existing problem of dependency within the social movement. The existing neocolonialism brings detrimental effects to the movement, yet through the dependency it has created, the social movement must rely on its support, especially amid the authoritarian crackdowns from the regime.

Furthermore, this research explores the implications of this dependency on the sustainability of the women's movement in Indonesia as a form of neoliberal colonization. Against this issue, this research highlights how the women's movement uses vigilant love through care and solidarity to survive and resist control exerted through dependency created within the imbalanced relations. Vigilant eco-love thus is ultimately posed as a form of resistance embedded within the existing practices employed by the civil society movement to survive against the threat of continuous dependency on foreign donors.

## **Method**

This research is a qualitative study using the reflexive thematic analysis method (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2019). This method emphasizes the identification,

analysis, and focus on themes in qualitative data. Reflexive thematic analysis emphasizes the positionality of the researcher and recognizes the subjectivity of the analysis, whether during the process of data collection and during the course of interpreting the data. Researchers have an active role in producing knowledge. This method is also per the researcher's positionality in this study as a woman activist who has been involved within the movement for 6 years and is expected to inform the analysis process that occurred, as the researcher's knowledge and understanding of the context helped inform the interpretation of data.

Data was obtained by interviewing 4 participants who are meaningfully involved in the women's movement. Subjects were chosen through purposeful sampling of selecting women activists who were relevant to the topic at hand. The first two subjects were chosen for their active participation in criticizing the imbalanced power relation between local organizations and donors. The first subject is Anik Tunjung, who serves as the executive management of Indonesia for Humanity (Indonesia untuk Kemanusiaan – IKa). Anik was chosen for her organization's involvement within the donor decolonization effort in the social movement, including the partnership they built with international decolonialization movements such as Peace Direct and Seize The Power. The second subject is a women's activist with the initials Desi who has been involved in the feminist and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) movement for more than 10 years at the grassroots, national, and regional levels. Desi was chosen with consideration of her experiences in organizations that received direct funding from the USAID and through her involvement as a party that was documenting the direct impact of the USAID freeze in the region, especially in feminist and SRHR organizations.

The third subject is Vanilla, a woman activist who worked in a freedom of speech CSO directly affected by the USAID suspension. Vanilla was chosen for the direct impact the USAID freeze towards both her employment status and involvement within the movement. The last subject is Ana, the executive director of the Women Crisis Center Jombang (WCC Jombang), a grassroots women's organization that assists women victims of gender-based violence in the Jombang Regency, East Java. Ana was chosen due to her organization's position as a grassroots CSO that largely relied on existing intermediary organizations, yet has initiated efforts to ensure financial sustainability outside of the existing aid model.

These research participants are women activists who are actively involved in the Indonesian women's movement and are familiar to one of the researchers, acknowledging



the existing history that can potentially affect the subjectivity of the research. The research data were qualitative data that were collected through semi-structured in-depth discussions through Zoom Cloud Meetings. Each interview lasted approximately 90-120 minutes and was recorded with the participants' consent. Through the recording, the researchers transcribed the data and coded the results to find the major themes. Coding and theme development were done through consideration towards the delicate context and while acknowledging the researcher's subjectivity.

## **Result and Discussion**

### **The Donor Neo-Colonialism in Indonesia:**

The discussion about the women's movement and its sustainability in Indonesia cannot be separated from the role of funding. Consistency of these fundings is the act of solidarity needed to support the resiliency of the movement (Indonesia for Humanity, 2025). This funding is not only needed for advocacy work, campaigns, and assistance for several CSOs but also for operational costs such as facilities used by CSOs, initiatives to improve organizational skills and knowledge, and wages for workers. Unfortunately, the government does not contribute much to the sustainability of CSOs, as the sector is not considered strategic and tends to criticize government work. Instead of making things easier, policies are often enacted to complicate the efforts of CSOs to obtain funds.

*"The government does not acknowledge the civil society movement. We have our own circular economy. They wish to control and surveil the existing organization, we are seen as something that must be feared due to our work in criticizing the government." (Anik, Indonesia for Humanity)*

Anik explained how the situation has resulted in CSOs in Indonesia becoming increasingly dependent on the role of foreign donors which has resulted in neo-colonialism. In this case, foreign donors have been widely criticized for the neo-colonialism and power relations that are perpetuated through their practices. Often, they are the ones who determine the direction and agenda of struggle and advocacy that should come from the grassroots. With short-term programmes that often focus on superficial issues, foreign aids often serve more as a tool of control over former colonies that still suffer from the impacts of centuries of colonization (Onyekachi, 2020).

The women's movement itself is not immune to this problem. Foreign donors such as USAID contribute to funding non-profit organizations through grants that are often given to grant maker organizations, often referred to as intermediary organizations. Interviews with

Indonesia for Humanity (IKa) executive management explain how grant makers exist to win funding that is also contested by organizations in other parts of the world. These grant-maker organizations in Indonesia include Humanis Foundation, Yayasan Gemilang Sehat Indonesia, and The Asia Foundation. These organizations can carry out the role because they have privileges, namely infrastructure and mechanisms that are accessed through parent organizations at the global level, such as HIVOS and Rutgers International. This finding is in line with Participant Ana from WCC Jombang explained that for grassroots organizations that receive sub-grants from grant-making organizations, this is a crucial way to survive. However, getting a sub-grant itself is not easy for many grassroots organizations. Calls for proposals for funding require persuasive English writing skills, while many grassroots organizations do not have the resources to meet these demands. This situation, again, serves as an example of how the coloniser's language is continuously being used to silence aid recipients who are often former colonies (Vitantonio, 2022).

This situation ultimately creates multi-layered power relations. Foreign donors have a demanding agenda and position that is often not in line with the struggle for social justice. This limits organizations from being able to access existing funding. From these power relations, informal discussions emerge about which issues are still appealing for funding, just as advocacy on the genocide of Palestine is forbidden to be discussed by donors who are not in favor of the resistance to this oppression. Organizations that take critical positions that are often in conflict with power holders are also marginalized from this funding pool. In addition, from a technical perspective, foreign donors often impose mechanisms and reporting systems that are difficult for grassroots organizations in Indonesia to satisfy. In every social intervention program preparation, donors often ask about plans to ensure the sustainability of a program. This question seems to be thrown at civil society in Indonesia to ensure that the funds that have been given will have a permanent impact. Unfortunately, this demand is accompanied by a complicated bureaucracy that does not consider the gaps of local organizations that often do not have the resources and systems expected by foreign donors. Participant Desi (pseudonym) gave the example of USAID as one donor that requires the bureaucratic process of accessing SAM.gov, an official US government website, which not all grassroots organizations can understand the way to operate. Meanwhile, barriers to English proficiency or operating these complex systems are difficult to break down because funding is generally limited to programs. Advocacy by the movement with the aim of decolonizing the donor-grantee relationship has worked to convince a handful of donors to adapt to the Indonesian situation and context. However, it is not uncommon for such rigid



reporting systems to be enforced by intermediary organizations instead, as they are in possession of more power in comparison to the grassroots organization. This is an example of how the civil society elites do exist within the ecology of social movement in Indonesia, creating hierarchies as a result of resources being hoarded by a handful of powerful organizations (Johansson & Meuwisse, 2024).

This imbalanced power relations within the movement is further amplified by the phenomenon of NGO industrialization. Ideally, CSOs in the movement have a vision and mission that is an important part of their idealism. However, the funding from donors certainly creates the existence of programs that often have to be adjusted to the donor's agendas and demands. Not infrequently, the organization will fall into the rhythm of this program to program instead of focusing on its original vision and mission. In the context of the freezing of USAID funds, the women's movement in Indonesia has experienced its own repercussions. The policy of the President of the United States that is not gender and women-friendly certainly has an impact on support for advocacy on women's issues, especially in Global South countries such as Indonesia. Participant Desi is also concerned about the long-term impact of this donor intervention on the women's movement, especially related to data collection on vulnerable and marginalized groups that are often demanded when donors grant funds. If the donor is not in favor of vulnerable communities, then the data may be prone to being used to crack down on vulnerable groups.

The suspension of USAID funds also often threatens the existence of various organizations in Indonesia. Without foreign aid, there are not many funding options for CSOs to survive, which in itself reveals the unsustainable nature of the movement. To continue their work, many CSOs in Indonesia have adopted a saving system. Although there is no single common mechanism, this system more or less references the saving practice carried out by grantee organizations by setting aside a portion of program funds for the organization to save. The funds set aside from the program budget are then managed by the organization to meet organizational needs, especially operational needs that are often not accommodated by the program budget. Some donors have allowed program budgets to include an overhead cost or management cost component that can be used to fund the organization's operational needs. However, this practice has not been adopted by all donors. In reality, grassroots organizations that receive sub-grants from intermediate organizations often do not receive much operational support funding. Ana, the director of WCC Jombang, a local CSO focused on providing legal aid for women victims of GBV, provided examples on how her organization must constantly work around the existing funds to ensure there were

funds for It is important to note that the saving system does not only exist to fund the office operations, but also the activities of the organization that are integral to the struggle against injustice. For women's organizations that have case handling as one of their main activities, donors often do not see this as a strategic activity to fund. Service providing is often seen as an activity that should be funded by the Indonesian government. Meanwhile, the Indonesian government, with its cumbersome bureaucracy and low political will, has yet to fulfill this obligation. In addition, there is a perception that case management is an activity that does not bring about systemic change and should be funded by the state, leading donors to refuse to fund these cases.

All of the participants made observations about international political events, such as the election of right-wing heads of state in some European countries and President Trump's conservative stance on various issues. The political situations of many forces in the Global North dictate the reality and political stability of countries in the Global South. Again, the situation further serves as evidence that neo-colonialism is an ever-present force that haunts the social movement. It is also very much a gendered issue that often alienates issues that do not comply with the current regime.

The situation paints a picture of the dependency of the local movement to the international donors due to the existing hierarchy of relations within the ecology of the movement. The dependency reflects the sheer amount of power the international political forces have over the sustainability of the local social justice movement, created from the imbalanced power relations and the ever-present colonialism that foreign donors exert over local organizations. The dependency demanded CSOs to be much more industrialized, in opposite to being a vigilant member of the civil society ecology. It also created detrimental practices such as the saving system that lacks vigilance and compassion for its impact on the most vulnerable members of the ecology. The next theme will further explain the impact of neocolonialism on activists who are often reduced to precarious workers within the uncertainties created by dependency.

### **Precarious Activism: Activists' Precarity in the Industrialized Civil Movement**

The power relations between donors and movements not only create vulnerabilities for organizations but also for the activists fighting for the cause. In the case of USAID's funding freeze, this has resulted in layoffs for various CSO workers, especially those who work on sensitive issues and have no funding options outside of USAID grants. For these activists, the hope of receiving severance pay is close to zero, robbing them of their rights as

workers within the increasingly industrialized civil movement. The saving system is rooted in the assumption that as an activist, voluntarism and sacrifice are expected to a certain degree. Yet, often this solution also has an impact on the welfare of activists who are essentially contracted as a worker due to the increasing demand of workload that exist due to the NGO-ization of CSOs.

The issue of the vulnerability of activists has also been widely discussed before as most activists who work in a CSO in Indonesia are usually contract workers. Being a contract worker means facing limited fulfillment of rights from the CSO as an employer. In social movements in Indonesia, it is not uncommon for organizations to be unable to provide social security, such as BPJS and other insurance. Salaries received by CSO workers are also often below the Regional Minimum Wage, a common occurrence, especially when the workers' salaries are cut to contribute to the organization's savings.

Naturally, the practice of the saving system is one example of anticipatory measures widely used by CSOs to ensure organizational sustainability. Grassroots CSOs often do not receive operational funds from sub-grants that are given by the intermediary organization, so they often have to deduct saving funds from the salary budget. In one case, even though the donor provided a salary budget of up to Rp 15,000,000, workers still received a salary according to the regional minimum wage, or even lower than that.

This issue of worker vulnerability becomes more apparent when there is a major change in the funding situation, such as the suspension of the USAID funding. An interview with Vanilla, an activist of a CSO that receives the majority of its funding from USAID, revealed a complicated situation of precarity. The CSO that Vanilla worked for was forced to lay off its workers due to a lack of funds to continue paying their salaries. Meanwhile, the current political climate in Indonesia ideally requires more activists to continue fighting for the cause, creating further complications to the situation.

As an activist, Vanilla understood that her organization's situation could not be compared to a company that would be able to provide severance pay. Yet, as an affected worker, Vanilla also wondered about what workers' rights she was supposed to receive when she was laid off. In addition, USAID's suspension meant that layoffs were not limited to one CSO, but many others, so Vanilla was not optimistic in her efforts to find another paying job in the struggling, competitive, and increasingly industrialized CSO worker market.

This situation is even more complex in relation to the movement for social justice. Vanilla considered that the organization where she worked for as having a very critical voice in challenging government policies. In the midst of Indonesia's democratic situation,

characterized by protests and people's discontent, financial support is increasingly needed so that CSOs can continue to carry out their work. Instead, the CSO that Vanilla worked for was only able to maintain fewer than five activists who had to deal with a regime that was reluctant to hear the voice of the people. Vanilla admitted that she understood the uncertainty of fighting in social movements.

*Vanilla said that there were coworkers who were less affected because they had more than one job as a backup source of income. However, Vanilla herself felt that this practice could not be done by everyone for a long time in a sustainable way, as fatigue and burnout would threaten the performance of an activist who must juggle between keeping their kitchen running and fighting against the increasingly authoritarian government, as she explained that "at the end of the day, we do our social work when our kitchen is still running."*

Vanilla observed that people who could devote their entire lives and time to social justice in the midst of this complicated situation were usually people from the middle class and above. This situation is in line with Anik's assessment, who found that many activists who have been working in the movement for a long time came from economically well-off backgrounds. This assessment can be understood as a result of the general uncertainty of workers' rights in Indonesian CSOs, along with the necessities of life that will always arise. For workers from the middle class or even the poor, this vulnerability is further compounded by the vulnerability of CSO workers who often have marginalized identities. For some workers, working in CSOs that fight for marginalized issues is their only option to make a living. It is not surprising that many workers focus on ensuring that their career in CSOs continues to progress due to limited options. Indirectly, this would cause situations where programmatic works would be prioritized as they were the kind of works that would bring funds to keep the kitchen running.

Desi, in particular, noted that the issue of neo-colonialism within the social movement could raise questions, such as whether a CSO worker is merely a worker or an activist? Desi highlighted the importance of understanding the work that we do as a calling, despite the complicated nature of the existing ecology that often lacks love towards one another. There will always be challenges within the social movement, but the most important thing is the focus on the cause. Desi hoped there would be a better system that could ensure not only the continuation of the CSO that must face pressures from due to the power relations with donors, but also the welfare of activists. The troubles and challenges that Vanilla faced due to the sudden layoff shed lights to the fact that despite fighting for social justice in order to bring about a better future for the marginalized, there are limited options to protect

activists from marginalization due to violations of worker's rights. As we try to understand the bigger picture of vulnerabilities, activists do understand that the violation was not done out of ill-will, yet it does not negate the reality of unemployment that they must face in this trying time. As the many Global North countries who usually serve as donors move to conservatism, this calls for changes and sudden efforts to adapt. This brings us to the next part of the discussion, which is the importance of vigilance and love within the social movement ecology, along with existing practices that could even out the power relations created by dependencies.

### **Vigilant Eco-Love in Sustainable Women's Movement**

Vanilla's layoff is just one of many that have occurred due to the USAID suspension. Seeing this situation, Vanilla expressed her hope for solidarity from social movements. In the increasingly industrialized social movement, CSOs still cannot operate like for-profit companies that can provide remuneration and severance pay. However, there are other resources that should be accessible for CSO workers, mainly in the form of solidarity among workers in CSOs in order to support each other in this time of vulnerability, be it those who are affected directly by the current situation or those who still have a safety net. Vanilla emphasized that this solidarity cannot just be false solidarity. Empathy is needed so that there is care for one another as part of a social movement to fight injustice. This hope is in line with the concept of vigilant eco-love, which emphasizes that in a world full of neo-liberal values, authentic love for others is needed to achieve social justice. A vigilant solidarity cannot just be any empty words of comfort, but it requires an actionable initiative to bring about changes.

Vanilla explained that this care can take the form of assistance to fellow workers in arms who have been laid off. Vanilla admits that she did not know many workers outside of her organization who experienced the same thing. She also had not heard of any community that supports other workers in this time of need. However, in her workplace, her colleagues had begun to share job vacancies and freelance work offers with each other. This practice is an example of solidarity between activists, despite the fact that the ecology itself is not ideal. Solidarity and strategies to ensure the sustainability of the movement need to go hand in hand. Vigilant eco-love emphasizes our relationality as individuals within an existing ecology, in this case within the women's movement. Ana explained that these solidarity efforts were already present in the women's movement in Indonesia, as seen in her organization strategy to ensure the sustainability of her CSO, which is based on collaboration

with integrity. WCC Jombang is a service provider organization committed to providing assistance to women victims of violence, both psychosocially and legally. WCC Jombang also networks with around 24 other CSOs in Jombang District with various different issue backgrounds. Ana emphasized the importance of collaboration, especially for vulnerable issues and the ones that require a long advocacy process.

Regarding the issue of organizational sustainability, a large budget is obtained from funds through sub-grants from an intermediary organization. Ana explained that WCC Jombang is also considering becoming an officially registered legal aid organization in accordance to the existing standard in Indonesia. The main consideration is also due to more diverse funding opportunities for legal aid organizations, especially from the government. The effort showed how CSO would often try to negotiate its position within the web of relations that exist within its ecology. Ana emphasized that it is not easy to collaborate with government stakeholders who do not necessarily have a perspective on gender justice. Within the imperfect situation, it is important for CSO to be able to establish a good relationship with the stakeholder. In its advocacy, WCC Jombang gained the opportunity to collaborate with the local Social Affairs Agency by providing training for social workers. In her education, Ana emphasized the importance of meaningful participation for CSOs so it will not be regarded as just a passing wind. In addition, WCC Jombang also opened up opportunities for cooperation with local companies that are increasingly interested in gender justice issues. Several companies based in Jombang Regency have invited WCC Jombang to provide training on gender-based violence vulnerabilities in the workplace. Through this collaboration, companies are also more interested in providing funding support.

The practice of corporate social responsibility (CSR), especially by multinational companies, has existed in Indonesia and is due for its own critical evaluation, as often it serves as another way for neo-colonial forces to reproduce gendered neocolonial relation (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2019). Ana acknowledged the conflicting nature of CSR funds, thus, she asserted that collaboration with various stakeholders, ranging from intermediate CSOs, the government, to companies, is a form of diversifying funding sources strategy implemented by WCC Jombang. This strategy also aims to ensure the integrity of the organization in carrying out its visions and missions for social justice. Likewise, the strategy has also been adapted by other organizations, such as those that which Desi has been involved in throughout the years. The assumption is that if the CSO loses one of its funding sources due to differences in objectives, breach of ethics, or a freeze like USAID situation, the



organization will not cease to exist and be able to continue its work. These arrays of efforts are strategies that can be employed by a CSO as a part of the ecology to erode the precarity. Another sustainability strategy rooted in relativity with ecology is through the strengthening of communities. WCC Jombang has been building communities, especially with women in various villages in Jombang Regency that have diverse backgrounds. Of course, strengthening this community is not easy, especially because there is a stigma from the local community regarding these social justice works. However, the approach to community leaders and the commitment to help the local village open the road. Ana explains that as she sees it:

*“Community is important as our ultimate safety net. Often, they would offer to share the cost of holding community activities that aim to educate people on gender justice. Slowly, there is a collective awareness that the issue (gender justice) is an important issue that belongs to the public, not just a source of income or an industry.” (Ana, WCC Jombang)*

While doing this community approach, Ana admitted that not all members of this community had an equal level of understanding. Given the background of Jombang County as a religious *santri* city, it was not uncommon for members of the community to disagree with gender justice notions and sensitive issues. In this regard, Ana emphasized the importance of patience and willingness of the movement to continue initiating dialogue and discussion because “We cannot expect them to be perfect. Even a victim of gender based violence is not perfect. It is important to be understanding.”

These WCC Jombang efforts demonstrate the importance of CSOs to be able to position themselves as part of the existing ecology. WCC Jombang is vigilant not only towards the vulnerabilities of their organization and the beneficiaries, but also the complicated nature of the existing social field in Jombang Regency. The love shown by WCC Jombang to its community includes providing empathy and understanding about the precarity and limitations of public access that hinder their understanding of social justice issues. In the condition of countries that have not prioritized gender justice issues, service providers CSOs do not necessarily get the same support. Therefore, vigilance and love are needed to ensure a robust understanding of the ecology where a CSO is positioned.

The importance of solidarity is also noted by Anik, as part of Indonesia untuk Kemanusiaan (IKa). IKa prided itself as a civil society resource organization. It does not dream to be a massive organization and pursues pathways that could ensure that it will always be rooted within the movement. Constant vigilance towards the hierarchy and power relation that can exist even within the movement is integral to ensure a sustainable

movement. Thus, Ika highlighted the collaboration efforts with organizations that exist outside of Indonesia, as the effort to negotiate a more even playing field within the aid industry cannot come as easily. In regard to the issue of the massive layoff due to the freezing of USAID, Anik was of the opinion that the event could also serve as a wake-up call for the reality of the unsustainable practices built upon dependencies on foreign donors. Anik gave examples of public fundraising efforts as one way to support a CSO without relying on foreign donors, yet even then, she admitted that the practices themselves required resources that were often not available for most CSOs in Indonesia. Thus, she highlighted the importance of continuous fighting for a more equal relationship between foreign donors and the local CSOs. If, foreign donors truly wanted to bring a better change within the social-political situation of countries in the Global South, there must be a willingness to act as partners, not a monarch, or a *ndoro*, that would turn their back at any moment of inconvenience.

## Conclusion

Based on the results and discussions above, it can be concluded that donor neo-colonialism is indeed a situation that haunts the ecology of the social justice movement in Indonesia, including the women's movement. Using vigilant eco-love, the article examined the complicated ecology caused by the significantly low government support for civil society in Indonesia, the power relations between foreign donors and local CSOs, and the hierarchy formed among CSOs. The dependency reflected the imbalanced power relation that continues to not only exist, but deepen with time, despite the claims that grants are given to provide relief and betterment for life in the Global South. Through situations such as the USAID suspension, the commitment is questioned further, as power gaps continue to widen between foreign donors, intermediary organizations, and local grassroots CSOs.

The paradoxical nature is explained through the lack of vigilance and love that should be provided by foreign donors who claim to strive for a better social situation. Furthermore, within this ecology, CSOs are forced to transform into an industry where activists are reduced to workers who often face violations of rights. Yet, the transformation remains ambiguous due to the lack of stability within the social movements that are very easily influenced by the political context and the demand for volunteerism, which does not match the expected efforts created by the program-to-program system.

Ideally, the sustainability of the movement is closely related to the existence of activists at CSO who continue to raise their voice against injustice. Nonetheless, the far-

from-ideal funding situation threatens the lives of its activists, who are forced to be positioned as workers, especially those from vulnerable groups. The implication that these movements are only accessible to those from a middle to upper-middle economic background highlights the contradictory nature that donor neocolonialism has created in the civil movement of Indonesia.

Faced with this problem, the article concludes that solidarity is needed to maintain the fighting spirit in the movement. Looking at hopes and practices at the grassroots, this article emphasizes the importance of love-filled vigilance in fighting for social justice. Practices that are aimed at holding more accountability and decreasing CSOs' dependency on foreign funding do exist, yet need to be further amplified. CSOs should be able to position themselves in the local ecology and establish relationships with communities, comrades in arms, governments, and private companies that live in the area. Empathy and care are key elements for continuing to make sustainable changes, especially in a context that is still very conservative.

Nonetheless, the researchers acknowledge that there were limited number of participants that act as a key limitation in this study. While the study prioritizes depth of the data from each participant's varying experiences, this limitation may restrict the variety of perspectives needed to grasp the big picture of this issue. Future studies might benefit from widening the pool of participants to other relevant parties, such as the actual donors or intermediary donors, in order to deepen the findings. Additionally, they may also explore the aspects of power relation not only between donors and NGOs, but also NGOs and their resources within the region considering the geographical nature of Indonesia as an island country.

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