

# Promoting Social Justice through Philanthropy: Women's Activism as Civil Society

A Reflection on the Emergence of Yayasan Sahabat Ibu in Yogyakarta

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**Abstract**— The emergence of woman's activism as civil society is driven by high sense of humanity to overcome the various social inequalities that have so far been difficult, especially women who often threaten by patriarchal social, economic and political structures. This sense of awareness of woman's problem is then translated into various social philanthropy programs to reduce various forms of gaps and weakness of society. This paper discusses how women activism, in this case is Yayasan Sahabat Ibu (YSI), have participated to solve various social problems, especially related to women. By operating qualitative method and theory of civil society and social justice philanthropy, this paper reflects on the rise of YSI and It's role in promoting social justice. YSI as women activists involved in reducing existing social inequality through its activism in the philanthropic movement. YSI mobilizes the available resources and then distributes it to the needy. The transformation of the organization is followed by a paradigm shift and activism orientation from charity to productive empowerment as an effort for long-term struggle. YSI activists are then able to develop their movement by organizing themselves and transforming into non-governmental organizations concerned in empowering women by educative (PINTAR) and productive economic (PRIMA) program.

**Keywords**— *women's activism; civil society; philanthropy; social justice*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The many problems faced by women and the failure of governments to overcome them encourage the emergence of criticism and reaction from various elements of society. Elements of the community who care about the fate of women then appear and form groups or non-governmental organizations to fight for and empower women. One of them is a women's NGO which then performs assisting and defending women. These women's NGOs proclaim themselves to be autonomous, independent and gender-sensitive organizations [1].

In Yogyakarta in 2006 Yayasan Sahabat Ibu (YSI) existed as a women's NGO consisting of women activists. YSI's initial activity was a philanthropic practice to help victims of the 2006 Yogyakarta earthquake disaster especially for women and children community and economic recovery for families.

This program aims to build the solidity of family members of the community so that they more quickly rise from adversity. The program is realized in the form of activities such as nutrition assistance for infants, pregnant women and the elderly victims of earthquake in Pundong, Dlingo and Krapyak Bantul cooperated with Ishlah Foundation, UK, in 2006.

After the disaster recovery ended, YSI's empowerment target then shifted from women victims of natural disasters to women in general, especially those with minimal access to productive resources. The development of YSI empowerment target is a carefulness of the activists in looking at women's problems. YSI believes that women's issues are increasingly complex. Therefore, YSI seeks to empower women by targeting women who want to develop their potential and capacity but are constrained by the lack of access to productive resources (sahabatibu.org). With the shift of empowerment targets, YSI's empowerment program is now also becoming more diverse, which emphasizes the educational, parenting and entrepreneurship aspects of women.

The emergence of YSI shows the urgency of the role of women activism to help overcome the problems and social imbalances that occur around it. Such activism as a manifestation of care and criticism in addressing social problems. Through social philanthropy activities, YSI seeks to reduce the variety of discrimination and inequalities experienced by women. They considered that the potential and productive role of women is not maximal because it is hampered by structural pressures that curb freedom of expression and self-development. Therefore, YSI began to change its activism paradigm from merely charitable philanthropy to productive.

In the context above, this paper discusses the existence and dynamics of YSI to improve the fate of women in Yogyakarta through volunteer activities. This paper is a reflection of YSI's emergence and struggle as part of a civil society that exemplifies the philanthropic practice of social justice. Through these philanthropic practices, YSI seeks to reduce the social inequalities and obstacles that women face in achieving social justice for women.

## II. THEORETICAL

### A. *Why YSI's Philanthropic Activism is Represented Civil Society? : A Theoretical Perspective*

The problems of women attract activists to protest and fight for the fate of women then represented in collective action. At the local level, according to West and Blumberg, collective action is concerned with issues of economic needs given women's traditional roles such as providing food, boards and family clothing are limited by patriarchal, racial and class affairs [2]. In term of Green it represented the characteristic of citizen activism which supported and respect women's rights and needs [3].

In this case, Yayasan Sahabat Ibu (YSI) is founded by several women activists that helped for promoting empowered women. For the effectiveness of the struggle, YSI women's activism is then institutionalized in the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that are increasingly widening awareness of women's issues [4]. NGO's is the local organizations people then known as civil society organizations (CSOs) [3]. Civil Society organization included of different types, size, purpose and level of formality [5].

Although many scholars distinguish between NGOs and CSOs, but both of them work to support the fulfillment of public interest more effective than state do [3] Women NGOs are required to help target women to achieve the empowerment goals [6]. (1) Improving women's ability to involve themselves as the subject of development. (2) Improving women's capacity in leadership, to improve bargaining position and involvement in every development program either as planners, implementers, and monitoring and evaluation of activities; (3) Improving women ability in managing household, small and large industries to support the increasing needs of households, as well as open productive and independent employment opportunities, Increasing the role and function of women's organizations at the local level as a forum for women's empowerment to be actively involved in development programs in their areas of residence.

This paper refers to the opinion of Akman which views civil society from the perspective of social orientation [7]. In that perspective civil society is part of a diverse model of social actor interaction and forms an autonomous organization of government. Civil society is understood as a social network that continues to be maintained and maintained by social actors based on the values of the value system, identity and interests [7].

Civil society includes various voluntary organizations, philanthropic institutions, socio-political movements, public spaces, social networks and community involvement in politics and patterns of behavior of groups of a certain value [8]. Civil society plays an important role in promoting development [9], advancing public sphere and forums of public [10] and generating the participation of citizen [11]. At the local level, civil society and non-profit organizations are

part of community development and empowerment strategies [8]. Kang called it domestic strategies of civil society [12].

YSI historically is voluntary organization that actively provided the need such as food, clothes, etc. for people especially women and child. The term philanthropy comes from Greek, Philos (love) and anthopos (human). Literally, philanthropy is a conceptualization of the practice of giving, servicing and association voluntarily to help others in need as an expression of love. In terminology Philanthropy means action based on feelings of love to fellow human beings and the value of humanity with the intention to help him, both in material and immaterial. Robert L. Payton gives the definition of philanthropy as a voluntary activity for the public good [13].

YSI then shifted its paradigm to promote Philanthropy of social justice that focus eliminates social injustice that becomes the root of poverty [14]. Philanthropic social justice can bridge social inequality and mobilize resources through the collective action of society [14,15]. It also plays an important role in creating structural change for the oppressed community [15] and becomes the third actor of community development [16].

According to Barry Knight [17] there are five philanthropic factors of social justice. *First* meet the basic needs of society such as clothing, food, health and home. *Second*, fight for equality such as gender equality, anti-discrimination and human rights. *Third*, it deals with power sharing such as democracy enforcement. *Fourth*, funding for community capacity building. *Fifth*, public participation in decision making.

## III. METHOD

This research uses qualitative method and historical approach to see the dynamics of Yayasan Sahabat. Data collection in this study used in-depth interviews and observations of facilitators and participants or members of Yayasan Sahabat Ibu. The informants were determined purposively according to the characteristics and types of data needed, especially to the founder of YSI. The validity of this research data is done through triangulation of data (use of various data sources). The source of data in question is the result of interviews to informants, observation and documentation.

## IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### A. *Promoting Social Justice: A Reflection on the Role of Yayasan Sahabat Ibu (YSI) as Civil Society through Philanthropy Activism*

Yayasan Sahabat Ibu (YSI) is a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) established since 2006 in Yogyakarta. YSI has a secretariat office addressed at Kebanggaan UH V / 643 RT.20 RW.05, Pandeyan, Umbulharjo Yogyakarta. Although it was established since 2006 but YSI has a legal

entity notarial deed no. 5 dated July 22, 2010. YSI also just get the legality of the government that is SK Kemenkumham AHU-831.AH.01.04 in 2011 and SK Orsos No: 222 / 239.GR.I / 2012 and SKT Kemndagri No. 03.041.350.4-541.000.

Historically, YSI was founded starting from the wishes of several women activists namely Wahyu Tusi Wardani, Ibu Sumaryatin and Mrs. Dwi Churnia Handayani to help, restore and strengthen the independence of women after the earthquake disaster in 2006 in Bantul, Yogyakarta. At that time, the condition of women unstable after the earthquake disaster. Some of the victims' houses were damaged and uninhabitable. On the other hand, many of their husbands lost their jobs. The condition of women and children is very alarming when in evacuation they do not have recreative and educative activities. From there then the three activists were moved to help earthquake victims, especially women and children. These activities are part of civil society that seeks to distribute resources to the needy [9].

The three women activists then formed a group of disaster volunteers assisted by several other activists. Their initial program was post-earthquake recovery for the women's community, children's programs and recovery programs for families. Their focus at that time only restore the condition of earthquake victims both from the physical, mental and economic. The programs that run are still spontaneous depending on the situation and conditions at that time.

The recovery activities carried out by YSI's pioneer activists at that time vary depending on the target and needs of the earthquake victims. To carry out its humanitarian activities YSI at that time involved volunteers who mostly came from students who have a concern to help earthquake victims. The students have their own duties and functions according to their division of tasks. The concentration of the program at that time was just a cheerful school activity for children and education and parenting for earthquake victims. YSI activists used PKK (Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga) activities to implement their educational programs.

YSI's programs are basically directed towards the realization of independent women. The direction of his movement is covered in one main slogan namely, friendship embodies self-reliance. YSI makes itself a platform for educating women through training, education and empowerment activities. However, according to one of its pioneers, YSI is not directed to fight for women's gender equality. YSI is only intended to improve the quality of women in order to play an optimal role in the family. YSI paid more attention to the aspects that women needed to form a quality family [6].

Several times YSI also held educational activities of women who were the focus of their attention at the time. YSI also worked with NGOs from the UK, Muslim Hand to implement Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) program in Kulonprogo in 2007 and 2008. In the same year, YSI also conducted "Mental Healing" Training Program for women

volunteers conducted on cooperation between Yayasan Sahabat Ibu Yogyakarta and Mercy Malaysia involved directly assisting women and child victims of earthquake 2 times.

After the eruption of Mount Merapi, various aid came with various types from government and private or private. Help from abroad also flow for victims of eruption. However, according to YSI these aids are less precise and often uneven distribution. Most parties concerned with the eruption victims only provide charitable assistance alone without including educative and productive assistance. From such circumstances YSI activists took the initiative to develop their humanitarian activities not only merely charitable but also productive and educative. YSI views that charitable assistance can only be enjoyed at a glance. Even worse would potentially cause dependence of the victims of eruption on the availability of assistance. Therefore, YSI intends to give "fishing and hook" not just give "fish" only to the victims in order to rise. This is in line with the philanthropic objectives of social justice [14,17].

Starting from the idea of providing productive assistance for victims of eruption, YSI then tried to find donors and collect aid to be distributed to the victims of the eruption in the form of rolling capital. The emergence of the idea of granting revolving loan capital because YSI feel donor fund donations given directly to the victims can only be enjoyed briefly and the benefits do not last long.

#### *B. The Paradigm and Institutional Transformation of YSI and the Obstacles in Promoting Social Justice*

Since occurred paradigm and institutional transformation, Yayasan Sahabat Ibu is referring to one main vision, which is to form female companions to be independent. To realize that vision, YSI launched several missions: (1) to strengthen women's independence through micro business, (2). Strengthening the capacity of women to perform their various roles with educational programs, (3) developing women's organizing capacity through community empowerment. The entire mission is applied to several synergistic empowerment programs. Each program runs in tandem with the target group of participants. Some of these programs include PROSIBU (Program Benefit for Mother), PRIMA (Program Ibu Mandiri) and PINTAR (Smart and Skilled Mother Program).

However, YSI's transformation faces challenges. As Eko points out [18], Suryochondro [19] and Muchtar [4] there are at least four major problems facing YSI. The *first* form of problem institutions and internal problems such as management, organization, finance. YSI's organizational form is a foundation that although more popular and apolitical but can limit their potential to realize social transformation because the centralized structure of the founders and administrators thereby reducing public participation [4]. From the financial aspect, Yayasan Sahabat Ibu can be said to rely heavily on donors to meet their financial shortcomings. This is very reasonable because YSI so far has not had income from productive business. YSI relies solely on donors from

corporations, government and private institutions, and philanthropists to cover all their financing needs.

*Second*, the problem of patron-client relationships with the government and other elements of society such as the private sector that can cause dependence, thus hindering the independence of the empowerment program because it must adjust to the interests of the aid providers. Sometimes, partners decide on unilateral cooperation. If the partners are satisfied with the performance of YSI programs in the community, the cooperation is often continued in the same program. Many partners stop cooperation because they are project-oriented only. Third, the problem of approach and strategy centered on the leadership of the foundation so that often the program does not run smoothly and on target.

The challenges faced by YSI are mostly derived from the internal organization itself, mainly from structures and institutional management. However, so far YSI has attempted to address them through regular monitoring and evaluation of staff performance and effectiveness of empowerment programs. Even YSI is also trying to escape from the dependence of the donors to run the program independently and improve the productivity of empowerment program through the establishment of savings and loan cooperatives. It shows that YSI activists are able to adapt to the demands and needs of change so that women's problems can be overcome.

#### V. CONCLUSION

YSI's activism with social philanthropy activities at the beginning of its emergence shows that they have concerns about humanitarian issues, especially women. Such activism is part of civil society that is moved to overcome all forms of unfavorable conditions and social imbalances in society so that social justice is achieved. The transformation of their philanthropic activity from charity into productive and social justice is an adaptation to the needs of women. Likewise, the transformation of paradigms and institutions within the organization of YSI further emphasizes its participation as a civil society.

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