**Diffusing Consumerism in Indonesia: a Study on the Yogyakarta Consumer Institute (YCI)**

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**Abstract**

Having one of the largest consumer bases in the world does not necessarily entail Indonesia has strong consumer organizations and high consumer protection. This paper addresses this issue and responds to the following questions: what activities has Yogyakarta Consumer Institute (YCI) conducted for mainstream consumers’ rights at the grassroots? What factors are identified as supporting and constraining the delivery of these activities? How are they managed? In general, what do activists believe the activities’ effects have been and how it has been assessed? Interviewed members of executive board and board of directors, the present research found that the main activities of YCI were advocacy and education to mainstream consumerism in Indonesia. The first provides consumers a place to report their problems and defends consumers’ rights in dispute and resolution processes. The later intends to induce awareness and critical thinking to consumers based on solidarity as its core values. The existing solidarity among YCI’s volunteers and its well-established networks were factors strengthening YCI as a self-reliant organization. YCI struggled with several factors such as volunteer management, finance, and consumers’ ignorance. The first relates to “moonlighting” volunteers lingering program implementations. The second appears as YCI had no major funding due to a strict ideological policy not to seek or earn money from external parties. The last factor is associated with the general situation of consumer awareness in Indonesia that is still low and lacks solidarity. The general belief of YCI’s consumerism activists has been that consumerism is still an unpopular issue in Indonesia. Although the consumer protection law has been enacted for more than a decade, it has not brought significant changes due to embedded weaknesses, low law enforcement, political willingness, and the influence of the mass media.

**Introduction**

As the fourth most populous country, Indonesia is a huge market for various products. For instance, in terms of information and technology consumption, Indonesia is the largest Internet user in Southeast Asia with more than 70 million users as of June 2014. More than 50 million Facebook subscribers in 2012 (http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats3.htm, retrieved December 22, 2014) and close to 20 million Twitter users (https://www.techinasia.com/rick-mulia-twitter-indonesia/, retrieved December 22, 2014). Considering these facts alone, Indonesia is such a huge market for various products.

The high numbers of consumers and their purchase power potential, however, has not resulted in corresponding leverage for consumerism in Indonesia. The idea of enforcing

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1 Trans. Lembaga Konsumen Yogyakarta
consumer rights, such as the right to have adequate information, the right to be protected from product side effects, and so forth, is far from recognized. There is only one non-governmental organization at the national level, and it is unknown how many there may be at the provincial levels.

One of consumer organizations with a state level operation is YCI, established in 1968; the name YCI is derived from the city’s name [Yogyakarta] that was also a national capital from 1946 to1949. YCI is different from the Consumers Association in Indonesia (Yayasan Lembaga Konsumen Indonesia) , which works at the national level through lobbying and advocacy. YCI mainly focuses on educating people at the grassroots level and trains members of society to be consumer defender agents as a long-term outcome.

Besides the small number of organizations voicing consumerism, the consumers themselves have insufficient motivation to assert their rights. There are many reasons for this, such as a cultural mental block and unequal power relations. As a collective culture, most Indonesians perceive that a stable relationship with groups is important and tends to avoid conflict by sacrificing individual happiness. Expressing individual interest causes breaks in personal relationships and group cohesiveness. During childhood, most in the young generation are conditioned to be uniform and have limited freedom to assert themselves as individuals. School activities are focused on memorizing facts instead of fostering creativity (Kompas, 2012) (Jakarta Globe, 2013). Therefore, most people lack the ability to exercise critical thinking and are inclined to accept a situation as taken for granted.

A more philosophical reason for the lack of consumerism in Indonesia is the unequal power relations between producers and consumers. Most consumers perceive that it will take a lot of energy to balance the relationship since the producers have more resources than they do. It is a common belief, for instance, that a 2000 rupiahs (about US$ .50 cents) increase in train fare, without corresponding facilities improvement, does not really matter compared to the costs consumers may spend to fight against it. Lacking solidarity among consumers caused by power inequality has created ignorance and demobilized society’s power to balance the existing relationship. This situation is aggravated by weak law enforcement from the authorities in which the sanctions given to the rule-breakers are limited to non-legal treatment such as warning and supervision for unethical conducts.

In order to remedy the situation, YCI invests in people through education, communication, and information programs. It has been empowering communities through consumerism literacy programs by initiating community groups to have regular meetings to discuss their rights as consumers and by providing community training to enhance solidarity.

As a self-reliant organization, YCI relentlessly fights for consumer justice through various efforts from education and information to legal and compliant advocacy. In doing these activities, the organization might be dealing with wide variety of challenges that need
to be overcome using its own resources as an organization independently, seeking for potential sources to sustain the operation, or utilizing the combination of both sources in the continuum. At the macro level, the organization also needs to map their impact by learning how the efforts have contributed to create justice for consumers and critical consumers in the region. In line with the aforementioned introduction, the paper addresses questions: what activities has YCI conducted for mainstream consumers’ rights at the grassroots? What factors are identified as supporting and constraining the delivery of these activities? How are they managed? In general, what do activists believe the activities’ effect has been and how it has been assessed?

Background

This section discusses three main background factors related to the examined case: the geographical profile of Indonesia and Yogyakarta, the development of NGOs, and a brief profile of YCI. This background presents a simple context for the study and does not aim to provide details of each aspect; therefore, further investigation is suggested.

Profile of Indonesia and Yogyakarta

Indonesia is a democratic country, in which, since 2009, the president was elected directly by citizens. The Indonesian political system has adopted the Trias Politica to separate legislative, executive, and judicial powers. The legislative power is vested in the People’s Consultative Assembly (Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat) that consists of the House of Representative (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat) and the Regional Representative Council (Dewan Perwakilan Daerah).

The organization under examination is situated in Yogyakarta Special Region, known as Yogyakarta. In 2010 the Yogyakarta population was 3,457,491 people, 66.44% and 33.56% were living in urban and rural area, respectively and the distribution was 31.62% in District of Sleman and 11.24% in the Municipal of Yogyakarta. In those who are above 15 years old, the literacy rate was 89.73%.

The province is located in Java Island, headed by a King that also rules as governor, and has an area 3.185,80 km². It consists of 4 districts (Sleman, Bantul, Gunungkidul, and Kulonprogo) and the municipality of Yogyakarta, and in general it has the same governance system as the national government. A special region classification is embedded due to Yogyakarta being the only region in Indonesia that still has a king with legitimate power over his people; it was also Indonesia’s capital during the Indonesian National Revolution from 1945-1949. Yogyakarta is well known as a college city as it has many universities and is one of the main study destinations throughout the country. Because of its cultural heritage and diverse natural scenery, it has also become a popular travel destination.

Development of NGOs in Indonesia.

Most NGOs in Indonesia are registered as private foundations and are community and mass-based organizations. Since 1998, after the resignation of General Soeharto, the number of
NGOs has exploded with significant support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). After more than three decades of dictatorship, regional autonomy and decentralization have brought large opportunity to organize citizens in public affairs (Antlov, Brinkerhoff and Rapp, 2010 p. 419) where the roles of NGOs in democratic governance vary as independent oversight through watchdog organizations, serving as formal facilitators of government-organized meetings, and independent advocacy campaigns on a variety of public issues (p. 428-429).

A report provided by International Labor Organization (ILO) in 2003 describes a new activism in Indonesia after 32 year of the New Order regime under President Soeharto. The report mainly emphasizes Civil Society Organization (CSO) as a broad entity in democratization processes. The term was popularized by scholars, media, and activists in the country including NGO workers. From NGO activists’ point of views, the term is a “good cover” for their work (Harney and Olivia, 2003). Which means the use CSO as a label is perceived as a mask to deliver their missions due to security reasons and some other negative stigma to NGOs. A 2009 Survey report used Nonprofit Organization (NPO) as a term to map the NGO sector in Indonesia. The report is a preliminary description of NPO accountability in Indonesia in terms of their legal accountability, program accountability, fiscal and financial accountability, and process accountability (Aritonang, Yusran, & Promedia, 2009).

According to an NPO Domestic Report (2010), the term non-profit organization is rarely used; however, non-government organization or Lembaga Swadaya Masyarakat (LSM/self-reliant organization) is a more common name. According to the Ministry Instruction No.8 1990, an LSM has the main role of increasing social, economic, and welfare of local communities through community involvement. It is not allowed to become actively involved in political activities or in any movement against government jurisdiction. Citing the Ministry of Law and Human Right’s data, the report states in 2009 there were 21,669 nonprofit organizations having legal status in Indonesia in which 98% have a foundation (yayasan) and 2% of the population has association (perkumpulan) as their legal status. It is also estimated that there were thousands of NPOs in district level that have no legal status (Team, 2010).

Several studies related to the legal environment of NGOs in Indonesia can be traced through online sources such as www.ngoregnet.org and www.indonesiango.org. Article 28 of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia recognizes freedom of speech and assembly to every citizen, and it becomes an “umbrella” of any regulations covering NPO in Indonesia. There are three laws regulating NPOs: Law No.16 2001 about Foundation, Law No. 28 2004 regarding the amendment of Law No. 16 2001, Staatblad 1987 about Association, and the Law No. 8 1985 regarding Social Organization. In total, there are 15 laws, 4 government regulations, and 7 ministerial decrees related to NPOs. The law on Foundation regulates non-membership NPOs, while Staatblad emphasizes mass-based NPOs. Both of these laws are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Law and Human Rights
and apply to any type of LSM/NPO. The Law of Social Organization is carried out by the Ministry of Home Affairs and regulates any types of NPO including labor union. The International NPO is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in coordination with other governmental institutions.

Profile of YCI

YCI is a nonprofit organization focusing on consumer protection and movement as its raison d’être. It was established in April 12, 1978, and formerly was a representative of the Consumer Association from Indonesia in Yogyakarta. In 1999, it voluntarily separated from the Indonesia Consumer Institute Foundation withholding YLKI Yogyakarta as a name. Six years later it formally became Yogyakarta Consumers Institute (YCI).

YCI has a vision of creating consumers who have awareness, knowledge, and skills in consumer protection. This involves four missions: a) to increase quantity and quality of consumers who have a good perspective on consumer protection; b) to form a society composed of people who through education and training are aware of their rights and obligations as consumers; c) to increase knowledge and skill of individuals and organizational entities in the field of consumer protection; and d) to give consumer protection knowledge to business entities.

In order to accomplish the visions, YCI mainly has three divisions: a) division of education, b) division of consumer protection, and c) division of advocacy. The division of education primarily works with communities to transfer knowledge and awareness of consumerism. It offers direct services to community groups that want to increase their understanding of consumer rights. This division also has initiated community groups to organize themselves and have regular meetings to intertwine their potentials. The division of consumer protection also provides a direct service to those who have issues with producers by offering them legal consultation and mediating consumer-producer disputes. The division of advocacy mainly works with decision makers to establish pro-consumers policy either through dialogue or by mobilizing society members to express their interests publicly.

Those divisions are within a program department under the supervision of executive boards. The executive board members include an executive director, treasurer and finance secretary, and a head of each aforementioned division. The executive board has collegial relations with each other and is under the supervision of board members, who consist of those who founded the organizations and are perceived as seniors in the field.

Literature review

Consumerism: a brief overview

It is difficult to say accurately when consumerism was first used in the literature of consumer movements. It seems it was in use conversationally in 1965 or 1966, and then it first appeared in The Journal of Consumer Affairs in 1970 (Roger, 1994). Consumerism is not
a static concept and there is no single definition that can comprehensively explain it. The most common understanding of this term is the widening range of activities of government, business, and independent organizations that are designated to protect individuals from the negative actions of the other two entities that can potentially violate their rights as consumers (Day & Aaker, 1970 p. 13). Regardless of its various definitions and uses, Day and Aaker identified three forms representing the term: protection against clear-cut abuses, provision of adequate information, and the protection of consumers against themselves and other consumers. These major themes will evolve since its complexities in the field increase.

Buskirk and Rother (1970) defined consumerism as the organized efforts of consumers seeking redress, restitution and remedy for dissatisfaction they have accumulated in the acquisition of their standard of living. Its movement is catalyzed by several factors: a) increased leisure time, rising incomes, higher educational levels, and general affluence of individuals; b) inflation that made purchase behavior more difficult; c) unemployment; d) demands for product improvement; e) increase of political will in business policy (Buskirk and Rother, 1970 p. 62-63).

Herrmann (1970 p. 57) identified a typology of groups who make up the consumer movement: a) the adaptationists who emphasize the importance of consumer education to protect themselves from fraud and deception. Empowering consumers to be more intelligent with the market has a larger portion in their organization missions than seeking new customers’ protection legislations; b) the protectionists that are mainly concerned with individuals’ physical health and safety issues. Scientists, physicians, nutritionists, and other professionals fall in this category; and c) the reformers that have the same focus as the adaptationists but also like to increase consumers’ voices with policy makers and business entities.

In the U.S., the consumerism movement was not only affected by social phenomena and political factors; it was also influenced by rapid urban population increase. During the 1970s-1980s, the general causes of consumerism were mainly themed around social and economic issues resulting in various outcomes such as consumer boycotts, an increase in fragmented consumerism, consumerism as part of the general dissatisfaction with society and capitalism, and consumerism as social movements (Carlson and Kangun, 1988).

To highlight consumerism in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, Hilton (2007 p. 134) proposed two perspectives. First, it has to do with the Americanization or westernization of global campaigning within civil society by pointing out the liberal rights-based philosophy during President Kennedy’s administration. Second, consumerism in the developing world is associated with post colonialism focusing on the question of poverty and basic needs provision. Mayer (cited in Darley and Johnson, 1993 p. 38) mentioned consumerism in developing countries is different from well-developed countries in terms of the indigenous characteristics of markets and consumers and external factors influencing the development of consumerism such as product exports, consumption standards, aspirations and conceptions of consumer policy.
Managing nonprofit organizations

In order to deliver the program, every organization needs a reliable management. Ideological foundations that often become a spirit of an NGO to assert the public interest are important in order to stay in touch with the organizational visions, and along with it outstanding managerial structures are crucial to the organizational mission. Those elements are necessary to keep the organizations accountable from stakeholders’ point of views. This section touches on aspects of management to deliver services in general nonprofit organizations, such as activities management and managing external and internal environments.

Najam has suggested four categories of roles that NGOs can carry on: service delivery, advocacy, innovation and monitoring, and policy entrepreneurs. Within this model, NGOs may take a role to stream policies as service providers, advocates, innovators, and monitors (Lewis, 2001 p. 109). There is also the possibility to combine all those roles to gain success as shown in Dawson’s study of NGOs in Peru (p. 138).

The NGO is one of the actors in the development field. It means an NGO needs to build its networks with other parties to foster partnerships in harnessing the accessible benefits of development for everyone. De Graaf provides a framework to examine NGO’s circle based on its relationship with the related environment. His framework has three layers: a) controlled, which covers any aspects that NGOs can manage by themselves such as budgeting, staffing, planning and so forth; b) influenced which explains NGOs ability in persuasion, lobbying, patronage, co-option and collaboration; and, c) appreciated, in which NGOs should establish priorities according to international contexts, or to draw a big picture of global issues (p.141).

Lewis (2001) highlights the importance of managing relationships and partnerships with communities, government, business sectors, and international development agencies (2001, p. 146-160). These entities can work together to create “megacommunities” to tackle global challenges (Gerenser, Kelly, Napolitano and Lee, 2008). However, the environment of this sector is characterized by goal ambiguity, conflicting performance standards, value differences, polycentric authority structures and dialectical change strategies (McGill and Wooten, 1975 p. 455); thus, NGOs should respond to this situation appropriately address respective issues caused by environmental changes.

Lewis (2001) suggested three managerial issues that apply to most nonprofit sectors such as leadership, governance, and volunteerism (p.187), and Ronalds (2010) elaborates external challenges faced by NGOs. Mostly he examines the shifting focus of developmental issues such as human rights, climate change, natural disaster, poverty, agriculture, international migration, and global economic recession. Along with it, he also emphasizes those issues which affect human rights mainstreaming on every line of developmental strategies causing the politicization of international aid. The later situation should be managed carefully by an NGO in order to assist and protect the most vulnerable sides in
developmental activities. Ronalds suggests NGOs improve stakeholder accountability, demonstrate effectiveness and efficiency, increase harmonization and coordination, and are able to respond to great expectations from stakeholders by building capacity, deepening policy skills, and seeking media exposure.

Ronalds also interrelates internal challenges of NGOs such as the legitimacy challenge, the human resources challenge, the leverage challenge (advocacy, partnering, and harnessing market), the technical challenge in conducting social analysis, the learning challenge in order to adapt to rapid shifting in the information age, and the fundraising challenge. Due to those identified challenges, Ronalds encourages INGOs to effectively modify their managerial system. Failing to reform, may cause the de-legitimacy of an NGO’s work.

Data and method

Data was collected through 9 open-ended interview questions addressing participants’ experience during their involvement in promoting consumerism with YCI. The participants range from board members, the executive director, the head of the education division as a representative of the executive board, and volunteers. The qualitative data gained from this procedure were analyzed using the interpretative method to synthesize participants’ responses.

Findings and discussion

The power of solidarity and networks

YCI has been involved with consumerism issues for 30 years. During that time their works mainly related to advocating consumer rights e.g. consumers’ rights to have proper public transportation, healthy food, and so forth. In the early 2000s, the organization started paying more attention to delivering consumer education through training, media, and forming community groups. Both activities have similar long-term outcomes to create critical consumers who are aware of their rights and obligations in the midst of unequal relations between producers and consumers. However, they have a special mission in the execution process of its organizational missions as mentioned by one of the founders, “our main programs are associated with consumer education and advocacy. Education has mission to get consumers understand and aware that they are being treated unjustly caused by unbalance system in the society. The other activity provides consumers a place to report occurring issues that appear during their relations with producers.” To return to the typology of consumerism groups suggested by Herrmann (1970 p. 57), according to its activities, YCI falls into the reformers category since YCI displays an element to apply consumer education activities as a strategy to protect consumers from fraud and deception, but also focuses on increasing consumers’ voices with policy makers and business entities.

In their service delivery, YCI identifies several supporting and constraining factors. The positive factors are maintained and the others are suppressed with respective responses; however, in the managerial level, there is a different perception. The executive
director perceives that the constraining factors can be responded to through building and maintaining the existing networks that YCI strongly has. The head of the education division sees that the organization is going too far in approaching the unfavorable factors.

These differences can be explained from a managerial level perspective in which the first party primarily deals with issues in the macro level, whereas the later has to face the real situation in the field. Managers perform three categories roles: a) the interpersonal roles that pictures managers as figureheads, external liaison agents, and leaders; b) the information processing roles that describe managers as a center of information in the organization’s system; and c) decision-making roles that grants power to managers to determine allocations of organizational resources (Mintzberg, 1971).

In this context, the head of education perceives the issues from a practical-solution approach, whereas the executive director seems to see the cases from a broader point of view. Regardless of this slight difference, in terms of leadership aspects, both are able to collaborate based on solidarity as an organization’s raison d’être:

“As one of the founders, myself and colleagues have a similar concerns to consumers, including ourselves, that have been treated unjustly. That motivated us to initiate a “group” to defend consumer justice that later we consciously called ourselves as consumer rights defenders.”

Solidarity is a major strength that exists within organizations supporting the organization’s wellbeing. This common wisdom contributes to organizational success in difficult times. According to the head of education division, there was a moment when the organization had insufficient budget to fund World Consumer Day celebrations in 2009: “It was the first attempt to celebrate the day, and then it becomes an annual event, therefore it was a very important stage for us. Amazingly, although it was tough, through networks that we have the situation was resolved. Our volunteers’ solidarity and persistence strongly helped.”

Lindenberg, Fetchenhauer, Flache, and Buunk (2006) refer to solidarity as the willingness of society’s members to help those in need, to contribute to a common good, to show themselves worthy of trust, and to be fair and considerate (p. 3). According to their frameworks, behavior is affected by a person’s personality, skills, and learning history, and situational contexts such as social, institutional, and cultural. These factors influence an individual’s definition of the situation through framing and a mental image of the relationship explaining why people behave with solidarity. The behavior includes five key elements: a) cooperation referring to a common good situation; b) fairness referring to a sharing situations; c) altruism referring to a need situation; d) trustworthiness referring to avoid violation of implicit and explicit agreements or promises, and e) consideration referring to abstaining from offense and making up when things go wrong (p.9). See Habermas (2013), Ryan (2013) and Soffer (2013) for more discussions.

Emphasizing networks, the executive director mentioned that YCI invests effort to implement collaborative programs with government, university, and other NGOs.
“At the late 90s when I started joining in YCI, civil society networks programs were warm post-Soeharto’s fall down\(^2\) YCI and other NGOs intensively involved in Yogyakarta Self-reliant organization forum (Forum LSM) to fight for civil society strengthening through capacity building activities and policy advocacy. In 2001, YCI directly involved in the formation process of Consumer Dispute Resolution Body in Yogyakarta as mandated by Consumer Protection Law. This was a pilot project of 8 cities in the country to initiate the body. YCI was part of the selection team to establish selection instruments to recruit candidates for the body. This role was maintained until next two periods after.”

The urgency of networks and partnership were highlighted by Lewis (2001, p. 146-160) as part of elements to manage a relationship with communities, government, business sector, and international development agencies. These entities can work together to create “megacommunities” to tackle global challenges (Gerenser, Kelly, Napolitano and Lee, 2008). This is also in line with what Frederickson (1997, p. 84) pointed out in order to efficiently achieve its mission an organization and administrators need to exercise their ability to build networks with other entities in their work’s complexity. Establishing networks with governance enables organization to link and engage in delivering public activities.

**Several Issues: volunteer management, finance, and consumers’ ignorance**

Despite its supporting factors, YCI faces the constraining internal and external factors hampering the organization. Those factors are volunteer management, financial issues, and consumers’ ignorance.

As nonprofit entities, YCI is heavily run by volunteers. However, volunteers themselves also have their own daily issues to resolve. As stated by the head of the education division,

“As a voluntary organization, creating a condition in which every job is delivered professionally and time allocation is still hard. It happens because the volunteers have responsibilities and jobs in other places outside YCI. To some extent, it becomes a particular barrier in program implementations”.

The advantages and disadvantages of volunteers are addressed by Grobman (2008 p. 135-140). He also provides practical ways to recruit, orient, and reward volunteers. Pynes (2009, p. 115-143) suggested developing human resources management policies and procedures to integrate volunteers into the everyday activities of the agency. It can be started by identifying volunteers’ motivations, time availability, expertise and interest. It is also effective to establish a volunteer database, and to train volunteers to carry out the

\(^2\) Soeharto was the second president of Republic of Indonesia that headed the country for 32 years. Although had been recognized for his achievement to make the country as “a tiger from Asia” in the mid 1980s and supported the non-bloc movement in the Cold War era, Soeharto’s administration (well-known as New Order to proceed the Old Order under Soekarno’s administration) exercised authoritarian government, corruption, collusion, and nepotism. Soeharto left office in May 2008 after civil society and democratization movement demands.
organization’s missions. Evaluation also matters in volunteer management in order to increase performance, maintain volunteers, or reallocate them to other areas. Farr (cited in Pynes, p. 127-128) identified responsibilities that a program manager should do to manage volunteers: a) obtaining and maintaining support for the volunteer program, b) developing, monitoring, and evaluating the volunteer program budget, c) keeping key officials informed about the scope of volunteer services, d) establishing and monitoring program goals, e) assigning volunteer responsibilities and monitoring results, f) assigning volunteer responsibilities and monitoring results, g) recommending policy changes or action steps to top management to maintain, improve, or expand the volunteer effort.

The financial issue is a classic issue that most organization faces. Although YCI can still survive due to its powerful volunteers and networks, the organization needs to work on the budgetary side:

“In terms of human and financial resources, YCI is far from to be called strong. YCI has no major funding sources from anywhere, and therefore, volunteer contributions are expected to support the organization.”

Aligned with the situation, a volunteer mentioned that YCI has less flexibility to earn money from donors that are perceived as neoliberal and/or capitalist agents. Dove (2001) gave a practical guidance on how to conduct fundraising program from potential donors, regardless of their ideological basis. According to Dove, establishing a fundraising management through campaigns, grant-writing, private donations can attract significant funds. He also identifies the role of leadership in organizations that might affect the fundraising program’s success, e.g. setting goals, encouraging the staff, formulating plans, for example.

A more macro constraining factor identified by executive directors constraining consumerism is consumers’ ignorance. For example, when YCI encourages consumers to boycott a certain product, they are inclined not to respond to it since they still perceive it as an individual’s problem. The majority of consumers have not been aware if they can build solidarity with others, then an extraordinary power can emerge:

“When we advocate for a victim of a train accident from various consumer backgrounds, at the end the consumers “step back” one by one when we suggested them to fight for their right in the court. We hadn’t been there yet, but they already “gave up” over the situation, and again, it was caused by individual reasons.”

In general, YCI’s consumer activists believe that consumerism in Indonesia still needs to be improved. Although the Consumer Dispute Resolution Law has been established, the law has not brought significant changes in the years since it was enacted. Regardless of the weaknesses of the law and weak law enforcement in the country, consumers’ participation in decision-making is still far from being optimal. On the other side, business interests in Indonesia still places economic growth as a primary option for policy maker, and consequently, consumers’ interests tend to be neglected. The consumerism issue in Indonesia is buried under a deep sea of politics and economics issue that are consistently
mainstreamed by mass media. The issue is like “a voice screaming in a desert”; a few people hear it but they are reluctant to either respond or actively join in.

**Conclusion and recommendations**

This research demonstrates that the main activities of YCI are advocacy and education to mainstream consumerism in Indonesia. The first activity provides consumers with a place to report their problems and defend consumers’ rights in dispute and resolution processes. The later has a specific goal to induce awareness and critical thinking to consumers based on solidarity as its core values. The existing volunteer solidarity and well-established networks are factors strengthening YCI as a self-reliant organization to mainstream consumerism in the region and country in general.

YCI is still struggling with several factors such as volunteer management, finance, and consumers’ ignorance. The first has to do with “moonlighting” volunteers that become particular constraint in the program implementation. The second appears since the organization has no major funding due to a strict ideological policy not to seek or earn money from external parties. The last factor associates the general situation of consumer awareness in the country that is still low and lacks solidarity.

The general belief of YCI’s consumerism activists is that consumerism is still an unpopular issue in the country. Although the law has been enacted for more than a decade, it has not brought significant changes due to the embedded weaknesses, low law enforcement in general, political will, and mass media.

Considering those issues, the following idiosyncratic recommendations are offered. First, it is important to maintain the established networks, and further assessment related to this governance is required. Several questions to address the evaluation are as follows: How do the networks benefit YCI to achieve its goals? Does the partnership have a long-term impact? How is the governance process managed?

Second, YCI has a powerful voluntary solidarity and it needs to be sustained by establishing human resources management. This does not necessarily mean creating a new division if efficiency is an issue, but putting a person in charge to manage volunteers in terms of recruitment, training, evaluation, and recognition process can be an alternative.

Third, financial issues within YCI might be addressed by maximizing the role of board directors. Those who are sitting as supervisors of the executive board hypothetically were recruited to bring financial and nonfinancial support to the organization. Further dialogue between two levels is necessary to set fundraising goals and strategies to achieve them.
References


