



Solidarity, Safety and Power

Young Women Organizing
in Indonesia

WOMEN
NAVIGATE
POWER

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Women Navigate Power is a series of short publications about women's organizing and movement building strategies in the global south. Originally inspired by a collection of articles edited by JASS (Just Associates) and Everjoyce Win of Action Aid International in 2007, the series continues to be produced by JASS in collaboration with various partners. For more about JASS visit www.justassociates.org

July 2018

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Layout and Design: WE Designs



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Acronyms

FAMM	Young Indonesian Women Activists' Forum (<i>Forum Aktivistis Perempuan Muda – Indonesia</i>)
JASS	Just Associates
JASS SEA	Just Associates Southeast Asia
LGBTI	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex
LBTI	lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and intersex
MBI	(JASS) movement-building institute
PEKKA	<i>Perempuan Kepala Keluarga</i> or Women-Headed Household Empowerment
PESADA	Perkumpulan Sada Ahmo



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Young Indonesian Women Activists' Forum (*Forum Aktivistis Perempuan Muda Indonesia or FAMM*) – a network of more than 350 young women from 30 provinces across Indonesia, unites rural, urban, indigenous, Muslim, Christian, and LGBTI activists. FAMM members tackle risky and sensitive issues such as the defence of land and water against environmentally damaging 'development' initiatives, rights for women and LGBTI communities, and personal and collective safety from domestic and political violence.

For an organizing and human rights network such as FAMM to emerge in the current context of closing civic space, rising religious fundamentalism and violence is no small achievement. In addition to long-standing class and gender inequalities, Indonesian women face increasing discrimination and restriction as neoliberal policies erode labor rights and the protection of the environment, government colludes with corporate power to seize land, and fundamentalisms shape norms and policy. It is particularly those activists who are rural, indigenous, younger, and/or LGBTI who – despite Indonesia's rich history of women's rights movements – are marginalized, criminalized, and stigmatized in the heightened repression of the present moment.

What has FAMM managed to achieve in this climate, and how? What lessons can be drawn from FAMM's experience to guide and inspire rights defenders in other hostile contexts? This report traces FAMM's trajectory and outlines the key methodologies behind its growth in order to share valuable lessons.

Initially 'JASS Indonesia,' and then renamed FAMM in 2012, this group evolved from JASS Southeast Asia's feminist movement-building processes, accompanied from 2007 on by experienced Indonesian organizers and mentors Nani Zulminarni and Dina Lumbantobing. Facilitated critical reflection – combining experiential and analytical learning – produces a movement leadership development process that is transformative both individually and collectively. The resulting shared political consciousness, solidarity and support among FAMM members serves as the foundation for both greater collective power and safety.

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With training and long-term accompaniment, FAMM has gone on to:

- Strengthen women's **critical consciousness, skill and confidence, as the basis for political leadership and collective action** in challenging contexts;
- Increase women's understanding of the context through a **shared analysis of gender, power, and the actors driving violence and restrictions** against women and LGBTI activists;
- Convene much-needed **safe, inspirational, and strategic spaces** that allow women to build trust, reflect on their situations, find common ground, shape a shared vision, and deepen political and strategic thinking;
- Improve members' safety by developing a **strong solidarity network that offers support including links to resources for members at risk** such as emergency funding, protection groups, and legal and psychological support; and
- Expand **connections to and learning with activists and networks across Southeast Asia as well as in other regions of the world**, to achieve greater visibility, solidarity, and support.

FAMM's capacity for fostering grassroots organizing, cross-movement solidarity, and collective action and safety can be seen as the fruit of a long-term investment in activist leadership, and as the springboard for public and political action. The impact radiates out as FAMM members go back to their own organizations, communities, and movements to share the transformative approach and methodologies they have learned.



I. DEFENDING RIGHTS IN HOSTILE CONTEXTS

Women activists and human rights campaigners around the world are threatened by the rise of extreme ideologies and powerful interest groups that lack public accountability. Extractive industries, large corporations, organized criminal and armed groups, and religious fundamentalists increasingly collude with political leaders to dominate the less powerful and grab control of resources regardless of basic rights and livelihoods.

Long-standing institutions and methods for defending human rights and protecting defenders are being undermined by corruption, violence, and impunity. Many human rights organizations are recognizing the urgent need for new approaches to protection, especially more collective, bottom-up strategies grounded in strong relationships, shared leadership, and movement-building.

Many human rights organizations are recognizing the urgent need for new approaches to protection, especially more collective, bottom-up strategies

In Indonesia – as in many other parts of the world – the power of fundamentalist religious groups, transnational companies, and their political allies continues to expand. At the heart of this power lies the perpetuation of political narratives and social norms that make life increasingly difficult and dangerous for women, that criminalize activists, and that stigmatize sexual minorities.

Space for civic and political activism in Indonesia has been shrinking as hostility rises toward human rights defenders and their agendas. Women and LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex) activists and those standing up to protect their environment, land and water are particularly threatened.

In this context, it is no small achievement for a young women’s movement such as the Young Indonesian Women Activists’ Forum (*Forum Aktivist Perempuan Muda Indonesia* or FАMM) to emerge and grow. A network of more than 350 young women from 30 provinces across the country, FАMM unites rural, urban, indigenous, Muslim, Christian, and LBTI women. FАMM brings together members tackling risky and sensitive issues such as the defence of land and water against environmentally damaging development;

rights for women and LGBTI communities; and personal and collective safety from domestic, fundamentalist, and other political violence.

The emergence of FAMM

In 2007, Just Associates Southeast Asia (JASS SEA) began hosting a series of movement-building institutes (MBIs) in the region. These included inter-generational dialogues to encourage the voice and leadership of younger women activists, capacity building and skill trainings, write-shops and tech exchanges. This process sparked a surge of young women's activism and organizing, including the formation in 2007 of JASS Indonesia. This network became FAMM in 2012, at which point the membership comprised 162 young, grassroots women.

In the beginning, the group focused primarily on confronting fundamentalisms, challenging them on the level of 'invisible power,' (beliefs and norms that are socially reinforced and often internalized) while developing a shared analysis of the political and cultural 'hidden power' influence of organized fundamentalist groups. (see pg 13 box on Power) Many of FAMM's early members were feminists and lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (LBT) women dealing with significant stigma in their families and communities. They needed 'safe space' to be able to unpack what was behind the stigma and find supportive community. By the time that a member called Eva Bande (profiled below) was arrested in 2014, FAMM was expanding its focus to activism on other issues such as extractives, and increasing its attention to safety for its members.

JASS SEA and its co-founders Nani Zulminarni and Dina Lumbantobing, with their organizations PEKKA and PESADA, accompanied FAMM from the beginning. Careful facilitation and mentorship by these and other experienced leaders have been key, as have methodologies of feminist popular education and the creation of safe space to discuss taboo and politically sensitive topics.

“As young women, you are being oppressed. You are not communicating, you are shy and find it difficult to express yourselves. Here, you can share yourself more. There is sisterhood and trust... You can share everything and feel safe about it... This is how we express our love, our hearts. We are here as one entity, one identity. We are FAMM-Indonesia.”
(Nani).

FAMM uses feminist popular education methods to develop critical consciousness and confidence as a foundation for voice, strategic thinking and collective action. By creating safe and alternative democratic spaces,

FAMM enables young women activists from diverse backgrounds to develop personal and political leadership. Members gain a critical, shared understanding of their contexts and issues, deepen their understanding of gender and power relations, and build trust and solidarity across their different identities. With a common vision, their sense of purpose is emboldened.

FAMM's safe spaces are also a source of refuge and regeneration for women activists dealing with risk, repression, and stigma. Sustained accompaniment and peer support among members forms the basis for collective safety, emergency support for members at risk, and long-term networks of solidarity. Members take these transformative methods and strategies home to their local organizations and communities, creating ripple effects far beyond FAMM's direct membership.

For young feminist leaders, LGBTI activists, and women environmental defenders, the FAMM network has been life-saving and sustaining. With training and long-term accompaniment from its co-founders Just Associates Southeast Asia (JASS SEA), PEKKA and PESADA, FAMM has:

- Strengthened **women's critical consciousness and confidence, as a foundation for taking political leadership and collective action** in difficult contexts;
- Increased women's understanding of their context through a **shared analysis of gender, power, and the actors driving violence and restrictions** against women and LGBTI activists;
- Convened **much-needed safe, inspirational, and strategic spaces** that allow women to build trust, reflect on their situations, find common ground, and build a shared vision;
- Improved members' safety by developing a **strong solidarity network and links to resources for urgent needs** – such as emergency funding, protection groups, and legal and psychological support; and
- Expanded **connections with activists and networks across Southeast Asia as well as in other regions of the world** – with the impact of greater visibility, solidarity and support.

FAMM's trajectory and methodologies offer valuable lessons for activists everywhere.

By creating safe and alternative democratic spaces, FAMM enables young women activists from diverse backgrounds to develop personal and political leadership.



II. CONTEXT, ISSUES, AND IDENTITIES

Women in rural and indigenous communities of Indonesia are affected by multiple and intersecting forms of gender inequality and discrimination. On top of their responsibilities for domestic work, reproduction, and income generation, women are also impacted by neoliberal policies that erode their labor rights and the security and sustainability of their land, water, and natural resources. These vulnerabilities are amplified by fundamentalist religious beliefs and laws that discriminate against women and criminalize sexual minorities. As FAMM's own analysis documents, repression continues to intensify. Ascendant for some time, fundamentalist thinking and leadership ensure that civic space and rights are increasingly curtailed.

Indonesia has a rich history of women's rights movements both before and since independence, with many dynamic leaders and organizations. However, in the current period of growing repression, younger women in rural areas are generally marginalized or silenced within their families and communities. Organizations led by older feminists tend to be more middle-class and urban; even there, young women lack a voice. LGBTI people and their issues are largely excluded from society as a whole, even within many women's organizations.

Unity and diversity

A defining feature of FAMM is its unity across a very diverse membership. While supporting young grassroots women to become leaders, the network explicitly embraces many different identities, issues, organizations, and contexts. Coming from 30 provinces across Indonesia, with contrasting cultures, dialects, ethnicities, and religions, the women champion a multitude of social justice causes.

“FAMM members are working on a range of issues in their communities: women migrants' and child migrants' rights, reproductive health for adolescents, public service and capacity

building, LGBT rights, HIV/AIDS education and sex workers, community organizing, micro-credit finance, organic farming, violence against women, and counselling for women and girl victims.” (Maria)

Indigenous women are well represented in FAMM, most working to protect their community’s autonomy, ancestral lands, water, and ecosystems from deforestation and mining, palm oil, and other monocultures. Confronted with expanding corporate agribusiness, extractive industries, and retail chains, FAMM members are involved with efforts to protect the lands and livelihoods of traditional farming and fishing communities.

“Since joining FAMM, I have become more connected to my identity and proud of that: I am first an Indigenous woman and second I am a member of FAMM.” (Olvy)

LBTI activists in FAMM have built support and solidarity for their work defending their rights to identity, dignity, and safety from harassment, criminalization, and violence. Some pre-colonial Indonesian cultures held inclusive and non-binary conceptions of gender; in Sulawesi Province, for example, some cultures recognized as many as five genders. Now, however, homophobia is actively promoted in Indonesia in the name of ‘tradition’, particularly by religious fundamentalist groups. While the integration of LBTI activists and issues with other women’s and indigenous rights has not been easy, it has become a defining strength of FAMM.

Intersectionality

An analytical tool that helps us to understand and respond to the ways in which multiple aspects of each person’s social identity and status intersect to create specific experiences of oppression and privilege. The concept of intersectionality, attributed to Kimberlee Crenshaw, emerged in part as a response to critiques that “women” as a political category over-generalized women’s experiences, privileging white, middle-class women, while making invisible the ways that race, class, sexuality, colonialism, and other factors of discrimination contribute to the experience of oppression. Intersectionality aims to move beyond overly simplified conceptions of identity – such as “working class” or “indigenous” – to examine complexities of multiple sources of privilege and subordination.

FAMM has facilitated discussion and dialogue, offered innovative frameworks for understanding gender and power, and built lasting relationships of trust. The resulting emergence of a shared, inclusive worldview enables FAMM members to resist the pressure of dominant political and cultural narratives.

“FAMM changed my point of view about the LGBT community. Since joining FAMM, we understand more about what LGBT is and that the community needs to be accepted and respected in the same way we want to be respected... Since then, we have worked with the LGBT community to include their rights in our agenda.” (Masmim)

FAMM’s ethos of diversity and inclusion grows from its embrace of intersectionality – recognizing that each person experiences multiple and interwoven identities and forms of both discrimination and privilege across gender, class, age, race, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, education, family roles, and so on.

Solidarity, collective power, and safety

By creating safe spaces for processes of feminist popular education and deep analysis of context, FAMM has created remarkable solidarity among its diverse membership. FAMM has facilitated discussion and dialogue, offered innovative frameworks for understanding gender and power, and built lasting relationships of trust. The resulting emergence of a shared, inclusive worldview enables FAMM members to resist the pressure of dominant political and cultural narratives.

“We feel like we are not alone, so we feel more powerful and stronger. I feel empowered in FAMM because we are talking about LGBT people within the indigenous community, which is really taboo. But in FAMM we can talk about these things openly.” (Olvy)

Importantly, FAMM has been able to use these safe spaces as a foundation for a political strategy for both collective power and collective safety, featuring:

- Ongoing mutual support and political education where frontline activists and their grassroots organizations can be re-energized and find common ground across many issues, identities, and local and national struggles;
- A protection and solidarity network with an internal alert and emergency response system, enabling members to assist those at risk, support activists dealing with exhaustion and threats, and activate a security network for help escaping violence and repression; and

- The systematic adaptation and sharing of FAMM's transformative methodologies within members' own organizations and communities, creating a cascading effect of solidarity, leadership, and collective safety at local levels.

Magdalena Kafiar

FAMM member, indigenous Papuan, and church leader Magdalena (Magda) Kafiar has been active in defending the human rights and lands of Papuan people in the context of increasing hostility and closing civic space.¹ She has faced threats for defending civil rights and the environment and considers FAMM as a source of solidarity and morale, supporting her development of community-led safety strategies in Papua.

The hardest thing about challenging civil rights violations in Papua is proving they exist. The Indonesian government has thrown a cloak of silence over past and current injustices, which makes speaking out and fighting back much more difficult – and dangerous. The military and police restrict and often repress activists in the provinces. “Working in the church is a way to stay safe doing humanitarian work in Papua,” Magda explains. Her office receives reports of abuses and goes out to investigate them, creating vital records of a reality that powerful interests want to hide. She collects stories about past crimes carried out with impunity, as well as the current land grabs and environmental destruction that are drastically altering the land and the lives of its inhabitants.

“Indigenous women rely on the forests, on the rivers—on all of our natural surroundings for survival,” Magda states. “For profit, these private companies cleared the forests and polluted the rivers. Indigenous women's lives have changed for the worse.”

Women like Magda also confront powerful limitations in the tribal structures. “One of the challenges that indigenous women have to face is they don't have bargaining power. Patriarchy has a very strong role in our tribe,” Magda says. “The women prepare food for the men's meetings. Women serve the men, but they are not involved in the decision-making.”

“Although I know the dangers, I keep the spirit and move forward. I have to struggle continuously to reveal the injustices in Papua.” (Magda)

1. This account is drawn from Global Fund for Women / DefendHer <https://www.globalfundforwomen.org/defendher/#magdalenakafiar>

III. POWER AND MOVEMENT-BUILDING

The story of FMM is best told through the people and processes that gave birth to it. FMM'S success in creating trust and solidarity across identities and in generating young women's political consciousness and leadership is grounded in four broad methods of movement-building:

- creating safe spaces and common purpose,
- fostering critical awareness and political development,
- understanding and building power, and
- strengthening voice, solidarity, and leadership

Throughout the process, experienced leaders helped FMM members to build their capacities in writing, communication, voice, organizing, and leadership. Members, in turn, mentor other activists in their local contexts.

Creating safe spaces and common purpose

In safe spaces, women are free to share their struggles, ask questions, break taboos, explore ideas, challenge assumptions, and develop their political ideas and identities.

To encourage relationships of trust and common purpose – as a springboard for public and political action – FMM creates safe spaces for dialogue and sisterhood. Safe space is more than a physical place: it is an open-minded way of being and relating that extends outward through members' efforts to create similar spaces in their own lives and communities. In safe spaces, women are free to share their struggles, ask questions, break taboos, explore ideas, challenge assumptions, and develop their political ideas and identities.

Safe spaces enable FMM's approach to feminist popular education – a deep, personal, and collective learning process. Participants gain critical awareness of the norms and structures of the oppression they have experienced and internalized, individually and socially. Members share personal experiences of discrimination based on gender or sexuality, domestic

violence, child abuse, family conflicts, stigma, and rejection by relatives. Such issues are seen as taboo and are not otherwise easily brought into the open.

Going against the grain of family and community norms can be a painful and even unbearable process; safe spaces sustain morale and hope, and keep members connected with a supportive community. They also help to sustain the alternative political views and identities rejected by the dominant culture.

“The discussions in safe spaces help members to reflect on their work and to regain power. A safe space can also be a place for a member to feel okay to take a break and rest as part of the healing process.” (Ajeng)

FAMM members open similar spaces for dialogue in their communities and organizations, as the basis for raising awareness, learning, and organizing.

“I copied FAMM in creating safe spaces for discussion and sharing opinions in indigenous women’s communities and safe spaces for workers. These discussions help me analyze the groups’ capacity and knowledge so I can plan capacity building such as public speaking.” (Meta).

Feminist popular education

A political, collective learning process aimed at “consciousness-raising”, based on facilitated dialogue that places the learners’ voices and lived experiences at the heart of the learning and enables an analysis of power and patriarchy. Brazilian scholar-activist Paulo Freire originally developed popular education about 50 years ago. Freire’s methods have been widely critiqued and adapted over the years, spawning many participatory and interactive learning processes. Feminist popular education incorporates a gender and a class analysis of oppression and starts with the personal dimension as a site for consciousness-raising and change. Feminist popular education acknowledges how socialization impacts a woman’s sense of herself, her self-confidence, health, body image, psychology, and ability to seek fulfillment and pleasure in all areas of life.

“I organized community-based education, discussion groups, and trainings for community members and for activists. I internalized the value of young women’s leadership and shared this within my family and in relationships within my organization.”
(Vivi)

Fostering critical awareness and political development

FAMM uses feminist popular education to expose and critique socialized patterns of power and patriarchy; to question cultural norms that discriminate against women, indigenous and LGBTI people; and to challenge dominant narratives about gender and sexuality.

Members participate in storytelling, creative reflection, drama, drawing, and critical dialogue. These methods allow them to explore the full meaning of their experiences at the conceptual, symbolic, emotional, and embodied levels. Comparing and analyzing their stories together, participants begin to question the socialized norms and beliefs that underlie their experience.

“In FAMM meetings, there is night discussion for sharing personal experience. I got this skill from FAMM. I established informal discussions in the community. Participants became more open about their experience of sexual violence. I share my experience as lesbian and I feel no-one judges me.” (Chang)

FAMM is grounded in the feminist popular education methods and modules used in JASS’s movement building institutes (MBIs).² Facilitated critical reflection – combining experiential and analytical methods – produces a learning process that is transformative both individually and collectively.

As with FAMM’s approach to safe spaces, members take what they learn back to their communities and organizations, adapting the methodology to their context and participants.

“I organized community-based education, discussion groups, and trainings for community members and for activists. I internalized the value of young women’s leadership and shared this within my family and in relationships within my organization.” (Vivi)

Understanding and building power

FAMM employs a set of innovative frameworks in order to understand power in its multiple dimensions, and then to build and transform power. These methods have been widely used by JASS and other organizations for many

2. Find out more here: <https://wise-toolkit.org/en/movement-building-journeys/south-east-asia>

years. The *Three Faces of Power* framework is used to analyze the various ways in which domination, control, and power over are maintained, and to identify strategies that contest and transform these forms of power.

Three Faces of Power

Face	Definition	Strategies for Change
Visible/ formal power	<p>State and formal political power—the laws, rules, authorities, institutions, and procedures of decision-making and enforcing the rules.</p> <p><i>Many social change strategies, focus only on visible forms of power, yet other forms of power play a large role in how and whether change happens.</i></p>	<p><i>To influence visible power:</i> Lobbying, advocacy, policy development and research, accountability efforts, reforming institutions, enforcement of rights, legal cases and elections</p>
Shadow/ hidden power	<p>Organized interests that work to influence and control state power and the political agenda, including who participates and who benefits in decision-making. Often operating behind the scenes, these interests exclude and delegitimize the concerns of less powerful groups, dominate the political narrative and use indirect or direct threats and violence to create fear and maintain power.</p>	<p><i>To challenge shadow/hidden power:</i> Lobbying, advocacy, Organizing and collective action to expose, delegitimize and challenge the agendas of non-state interests; boycotts, campaigns, direct action, protests and other pressure strategies. Development of our own alliances, networks for greater voice, power and safety.</p>
Invisible power	<p>The power of beliefs, ideology, social norms, and culture to shape people’s worldview, sense of self, values, and acceptance of what is considered normal and right. Both visible and hidden power interests also manipulate beliefs and narratives to bolster their authority – legitimizing certain ideas and behaviors, and delegitimizing and even demonizing others.</p>	<p><i>To change invisible power:</i> Analyze and question dominant norms, biases, and ideology; challenge narratives and create contrasting narratives to inspire new thinking and solutions; deal with internalized fear and oppression (self-care, community, cultural resistance, collective analysis).</p>

Power in public, private, and intimate spaces

Feminist power analysis recognizes that the personal is political. Gender and other aspects of our identity – including race, class, ethnicity, and sexuality – shape how we experience power within and across the intimate, private, and public spheres of our lives. Transforming power relations in one sphere (such as in domestic and intimate relationships) may help shift power in another sphere (public and professional life), and vice versa.

Building transformative power

FAMM also focuses on building positive power or “transformative power”. This framework defines types of power that activist and movements can develop in their work for social change. Power is not only negative (domination or *power over*) but also positive (power that can be generated for change). By fostering individual and collective capacity and empowerment, these expressions of power often produce more equitable relationships and transform *power over*.

JASS framework for Transformative Power

- **Power within:** an individual realization that one harbors power oneself. *Power within* is a person’s sense of self-worth, dignity and self-knowledge, and capacity to think, imagine, question, have hope.
- **Power to:** personal agency. *Power to* is the willingness and capacity to take action (such as speaking out, making one’s own choice, resisting repressive ideas or behavior). The unique potential of every person to shape their life and world.
- **Power with:** the power of numbers in working for a common goal or shared purpose. Finding common ground among different interests as the basis for mutual support, solidarity, and collective strength and impact.
- **Power for:** identifying what we stand for, the desired change. Defining and working toward an alternative vision of the world.

The power frameworks give FAMM members a clearer understanding of visible and hidden forms of domination or *power over*, as well as the *invisible power* of ideologies and norms that uphold and naturalize inequities and violence. The frameworks help members understand how beliefs and behaviors are socially constructed, and how to question these from a feminist perspective.

“I had not been introduced to feminism back then. But I had this feeling that there is something wrong. That I don’t fit into society. I didn’t have the language to articulate that. FAMM helped me to articulate that. Now I know that this problem is not God-made. It is human made. Power analysis made me recognize this.” (Ajeng).

FAMM members are consciously cultivating *transformative power* to effect change: *power within, power with, power for, and power to*. Given the many dimensions of *power over* that women experience, it takes time to develop the power within of dignity and self-worth, and the collective action of *power with*. For women in areas with fundamentalist or traditional values – and for those who have experienced threats, fear, and exclusion – it is vital to create spaces where self-confidence can grow into collective power.

“Once self-awareness is developed, it will encourage marginalized individuals to gather and organize among themselves. This process refers to the effort to build power because at this stage people are no longer looking at individual interest and identity; rather, they are taking individual experience as part of the common experience. ... This empowerment cycle will ... [develop the] individual’s capacity to influence, oppose bias, and [become] active in decision making processes.” (Mahina Masohi report)³

In workshops, members identify the actors and actions behind *power over* – visible, hidden, and invisible – and analyze the impact of this on their lives and communities. They then strategize ways to shift these political and power dynamics. Members map their own intersecting identities and experiences, and explore biases and beliefs related to gender, ethnicity, and sexuality.

“Since I joined FAMM, I began to understand about power analysis which built my capacity, and I carefully unravel each component – hidden, visible, invisible – so I can plan other actions and not focus on one strategy. This is a huge change, which taught me to become more critical and powerful in analyzing the problems I am facing.” (Magda)

“FAMM members are consciously cultivating *transformative power* to effect change: *power within, power with, power for, and power to*.”

3. Francesca Feruglio, Niken Lestari, Emma Bell and Karen Brock: “Building safe spaces to support young women’s participation in local governance in Indonesia”, FAMM and IDS, 2017. https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/123456789/13036/PracPaper_YoungWomenIndonesia_Online.pdf

Understanding power and strategizing in this way helps members affirm their identities, opens up alternative ways of thinking, and gives them courage to take leadership, act collectively, engage public opinion and challenge power over.

Understanding power and strategizing in this way helps members affirm their identities, opens up alternative ways of thinking, and gives them courage to take leadership, act collectively, engage public opinion and challenge power over.

“We are more self-confident and open. We start to believe in ourselves and become more assertive... about our identity. Usually we rely on what others think of us and external influence to understand our identity. Now, our confidence and identify come from ourselves and a sense of pride.” (Ajeng)

These frameworks for power analysis are used not only by FMM members; they are also widely shared with family members, friends, communities, and organizations, and have been used as the basis for mapping power actors and identifying strategies.

“We are active within the women’s community, and I often have discussions with them, for example mapping actors and their interests. I explain [the analysis] based on the cases that I faced in the field, so we can decide who can be our allies. We are also mapping other groups and organizations.” (Meta)

One member who organizes indigenous women uses the power frameworks in a participatory way to analyze problems such as illegal logging and the appropriation of natural resources in coastal areas. Another has used the power frameworks with a Papuan community whose lands were taken over by palm oil companies – mapping the colluding actors, owners, and local authorities as a basis for action. Yet another FMM member uses the mobile phone platform WhatsApp to facilitate problem analysis with LGBTI women.

Strengthening voice, solidarity, and leadership

“Leadership according to FMM does not refer to structural leadership ... ‘director’ or ‘manager’ positions. Any individual has leadership capacity and can be trained – and a young woman is no exception. To become a community organizer, a young woman has to transform herself to be a leader of the community.” (Mahina Masohi report)

Building on a foundation of social awareness and self-determination and a shared analysis of context and power, FMM workshops go on to impart a range of communication, organizing, and leadership skills for political action. The training develops common values and ethics, a collective vision of

change, and a mutual commitment to solidarity across the membership.

Vision

Creating a shared vision among members is vital to FAMM solidarity, given its diversity of identities and experiences.

“Identity intersection can potentially separate and fragment a movement... while a shared-vision among young women will enable and drive change.”
(Mahina Masohi report).

Having a common vision strengthens members' resistance to repressive fundamentalisms and helps to inspire and sustain their collective activism.

Having a common vision strengthens members' resistance to repressive fundamentalisms and helps to inspire and sustain their collective activism. FAMM goes beyond members' individual issues and organizational concerns in order to shape intersecting agendas based on common values. The power of this kind of alignment is evident in the cross-movement solidarity exhibited by FAMM members.

Voice

Where young women are socialized to remain silent, it is empowering to find the courage to speak out in public. Yet voice is not without risk. Those who do speak out are often stigmatized or marginalized by their own families and communities, and face backlash, threats, and criminalization from conservative forces locally or nationally.

FAMM workshops emphasize developing political communication skills – honing listening, speaking, writing, social media and digital technology skills – in conjunction with political savvy about strategic and safer forms of communication. Experienced trainers act as mentors and encourage younger women to take on public and facilitation roles.

“We started by listening to each other. The very first change after [joining] FAMM was we became more confident – not only because we can speak loudly through a microphone but also because we became facilitators and have been invited by others to be facilitators.” (Maria)

FAMM uses writing workshops – or ‘writeshops’ – to document ideas and experience, to share information and opinions, and to deepen participants commitment to activism and movement building. Tech exchange sessions develop members' skills in using digital technology and social media, as well as engaging with mainstream media to broaden its influence.

“This workshop was like a wake-up call for me. It shook my spirit, which was otherwise buried by routine activities.” (Maria)

Members also have facilitated similar communication workshops in their communities. For example, an indigenous leader who took part in FAMM writeshops supported a group of local women to write a petition to both the head of their village and a government commission to create a program for the elderly. In another case, local workshops supported older women to organize themselves to sell their products directly in the local market, avoiding middle-men, and to participate politically.

“In many religious texts, the leader in the household, religion, and state is a man or a group of men. Women were praised for their ‘good virtues’ and their obedient attitude... We did the opposite: we navigated the ‘L’ word in our personal and professional lives.” (Niken)

“Older women are braver to speak out in village meetings and they are very assertive. They were considered to be non-existent, [but] the capacity building that they experienced encouraged them to be brave enough to voice their rights. Previously, they are only following the decisions made by others but now they are able to speak up in village government.” (Magda)

Leadership

In Indonesia, leadership is often associated with age, experience, and masculine authority – and not with women, particularly younger women (*Mahina Masohi* report). FAMM challenges this power dynamic by modelling a different kind of leadership and encouraging self-awareness of members’ own practices.

“In many religious texts, the leader in the household, religion, and state is a man or a group of men. Women were praised for their ‘good virtues’ and their obedient attitude... We did the opposite: we navigated the ‘L’ word in our personal and professional lives.” (Niken)

FAMM members are often asked to carry out capacity development workshops in their local areas. These local trainings tend to focus on achieving concrete social, economic, and political outcomes that directly benefit women, while at the same time building women’s long-term organizational and leadership capacities.

“Every time I was asked to facilitate an activity, they asked me to conduct capacity building for women... These workshops

encourage the women to be more active and they asked for a follow up and other ways to develop the economies in their region so they will be less dependent on the [palm oil] companies.” (Magda)

FAMM members emphasize that the local capacity-building activities they conduct are focused not only on their organizations and networks, but on strengthening the capacities of women and communities at the grassroots level, in ways that cut across the issues they are facing. This cascading process of capacity-building is at the heart of FAMM’s movement-building approach.

IV. MOBILIZING FOR CHANGE

FAMM members are politically active at many levels – in their personal lives; in their communities; at the provincial, regional and national levels of Indonesia; and regionally in Southeast Asia. Members are involved in local and grassroots organizations, and this grounded gives strength and legitimacy to their movements and to the FAMM network at the same time.

While FAMM mobilizes publicly, it does not act as a centralized, national organization. Rather, FAMM's structure is light and decentralized, characterized by shared leadership at the regional and provincial levels, with a modest secretariat that consults with members and leads from behind. It is not an NGO or coalition, but a network of grounded activists for whom FAMM provides inspiration, solidarity, and strategic methods for movement-building.

Participating in local politics

Action research by FAMM in eight provinces found that at a local level, members often start by creating informal learning spaces for other women, in parallel with formal structures: Islamic prayer groups, Sunday schools, and community arts and conservation groups. Here, women develop their leadership skills and the confidence to take part in public life, in village councils for instance, without being silenced or stigmatized. (*Mahina Masohi* report).

FAMM members are politically active at many levels – in their personal lives; in their communities; at the provincial, regional and national levels of Indonesia; and regionally in Southeast Asia.

- FAMM members have taken part in local election processes as part of Polling Station Working Committees, conducting voter education trainings, organizing young people, and calling for greater participation of grassroots women in the electoral processes.
- An LGBTI activist was asked to prepare a group of young women and mothers to participate in elections. Afterwards, the women continued to operate as a craft group and received a grant from their district's social services.
- An indigenous activist organized older women to bring their crops directly to market, with the effect of raising their incomes. The women

became more assertive and outspoken in village meetings. Linking women's economic and political participation in this way is evident in much of FAMM members' local organizing.

Educating others

FAMM members reach out to others and conduct political education through trainings, workshops, and publications. For instance, activists contributed to a course on sexuality, and teach about "gender and Islam" through Islamic student unions. LGBTI activists in FAMM have organized public and online events to raise awareness about sexual diversity and identities, for example as part of the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOT). FAMM members have also raised awareness about the environmental and health implications of the extensive forest burning done by palm oil companies.

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Mobilizing nationally

At the national level, FAMM mobilizes collectively at least twice a year: on International Women's Day, 8 March, and in the One Day One Voice campaign to Eliminate Violence against Woman in November and December. Through actions at both the provincial and national levels, FAMM has taken up a wide range of issues and struggles:

- environmental protection, opposing the burning of forests to expand palm oil plantations and the destructive effects of extractive industries;
- protesting and resisting the closing of civic and political space, for example against the Ormas Bill that imposes restrictions on civil society organizations;
- resisting the imposition of restrictive and fundamentalist laws against women, such as the law making it illegal for women to sit straddling motorcycles behind men in Aceh Province;
- speaking out for LGBTI rights and protecting activists and leaders in this community from legal persecution, harassment, and violence;
- ending domestic violence and protecting child rights; and
- promoting women's participation in the electoral process and gaining voice and influence for women in local government.

Collective action in FAMM is both a means and an end – a process of gaining power and legitimacy, and an expression of power with tangible social and political effects.

Maria Mustika

A FMM pioneer until her untimely death in 2017, Maria Mustika is remembered with great affection and respect by her sister activists in FMM and JASS. Maria valued the ways in which safe spaces facilitated personal and collective empowerment as a basis for political voice and action.

“We have a real sisterhood and feel that FMM is our home. If our friend is going through something, we cry together with them. If a woman tells her story, ... we are safe and we can heal because we have solidarity and sisterhood.” (Maria)

Maria Mustika learned first-hand about the isolation and trauma that comes from stigma and shame in families and communities. Her LBTI activism grew from her own experience as a lesbian, and included the creation of a safe house, which she personally funded, to ensure that people had a safe place to live after coming out to their families. And just as she did within FMM, Maria played an important role in incorporating LBT issues into the agenda of other social movement organizations. She worked for the Center for Marginalized and Community Studies (CMARS), which gives voice to religious minority groups by ensuring their participation in national dialogues and anti-discrimination campaigns, and as an anti-violence spokesperson for the Indonesian Women’s Coalition for Justice and Democracy (KPI).

Maria found FMM to be a place of sisterhood which enabled her and others to find support, confidence and connections to take their organizing and activism to the next level. “Most of my friends are there, it’s our home,” she says. “And not only home, it’s also a family. We have all gained a new sense of feminism and women’s rights where all of us are part of the agenda.”

As Indonesia’s country representative for JASS Southeast Asia early on, Maria described a strategy called the balcony faction. “When we have parliament meetings in Indonesia, citizens can’t join the discussions directly but we can listen from the balcony. We listen and we provoke them (the parliamentarians) with noises. If they make the wrong decision or statement, we let them know. The women’s movement in Indonesia is doing this and becoming more famous or infamous with this kind of action”. Literally on the sidelines in parliament, the rebellious presence of these women activists made their voices heard.

US OR THEM

We stand here right now
We stand tall and proud
We stand on common ground

Because we are not alone
Because we are one
Because we are home

So don't lay your head down
Now
Because we must fight
Now

We must trigger people's passion

Now

We must stand up to those who have wronged us

Now

We must re-seize our rights and dignity
Now

We must be courageous
We must act now
as one
as home
in common

Are you ready?

Maria Mustika, February 2015

V. BACKLASH AND COLLECTIVE SAFETY

“We feel unsafe in our personal and public life. [We experience] a lot of pressure from the military and the lawmakers and the government and we feel resistance when we are working ... How can we try to raise our issues when we don't have any support from families or our organizations? We feel alone and hesitant.”
(quoted in an internal report on FAMM's consolidation)

Activists and human rights defenders worldwide face increasing attacks and intimidation from police, military, and fundamentalist forces. FAMM members have often been met with harassment, threats, and violence. Many are also stigmatized within their families, communities, and work places because of their activism. This is compounded by strict local laws that discriminate against women and LGBTI people and by national laws that restrict organizing and activists, such as the Ormas Law that gives government more power to control civil society.

As FAMM members have gained confidence and shown leadership, their visibility has attracted backlash and targeting. Individual activists have faced a range of threats, from harassment in social media, to public intimidation during events and mobilizations, to violent personal attacks

Religious fundamentalists target the LGBTI community, using mainstream and social media to spread messages of hate and fuel violence. In areas under Sharia law, such as Aceh Province, local regulations criminalize homosexuality and dictate what women can wear. LGBTI people are arrested and caned. At the national level, government officials and the Muslim clerical body have made public statements denouncing the LGBTI community, which in turn has fueled harassment and violence, including by police who use raids and public HIV testing to humiliate LGBTI people.

In contestation over land and natural resources, no clear lines separate national and provincial governments from increasingly powerful private corporations, which in turn allows extractive projects to multiply and grab land at the expense of communities and the environment.

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a range of threats, from harassment in social media, to public intimidation during events and mobilizations, to violent personal attacks. Some have experienced fear and danger to the degree that they have felt the need to pull back from their activism.

Strategies for safety

These realities have led FAMM to focus on addressing risks for activists and how to support the safety of its members. The network supports the strategic capacity of its members to participate safely in civic spaces, and to build collective safety and urgent response strategies to protect its members at different levels, from local to national. While these approaches are still evolving, FAMM offers valuable lessons from its bottom-up approach to activist safety in hostile contexts.

Indigenous activists dealing with extractive industries such as palm oil and logging companies and organizing around the rights of marginalized ethnic groups are taking precautions to be able to hold meetings and to move safely in their provinces. Some have had to move or abandon meetings because of intimidation by soldiers protecting the interests of companies. Knowing who to trust, including within civil society organizations, is a constant challenge. Activists receive security training, including digital security, and replicate these trainings locally. Increasingly, their organizations are putting in place security measures and communication protocols to protect staff.

“I do not post on Facebook so I don't get recognized easily. My office always gives me a letter of assignment, so I can evaluate the obstacles in the field. Before I go to an area that has no telephone signal, I have to inform the main office, then the main office informs the regional office and then I am allowed to enter that area. The branch office will provide a companion and any help I need.” (Indigenous activist)

LBTI activists in FAMM work to inform their communities about their rights, analyzing a draft national law that would criminalize them, and providing legal support to those arrested or facing trial. One created a safe house for LGBTI people facing threats and harassment. Activists are becoming more strategic about organizing public events safely and teaching one another how to avoid being targeted. They sometimes have to cancel events or move them to safer locations in response to threats, and they put evacuation and safe-refuge plans in place. Members provide training in digital security, including how to maintain a safe profile and avoid calling attention to one's identity.

The network supports the strategic capacity of its members to participate safely in civic spaces, and to build collective safety and urgent response strategies to protect its members

“I warn [my lesbian friends] not to post personal and sensitive content in their social media, because their posts can reinforce the negative stigma toward lesbians... This is not easy. [I also guide them] not to react or respond to hate content in social media.” (Farid)

The issue of disguising one’s identity, whether online or in public, is a sensitive one, as it can be seen as giving in to dominant narratives and power relations. FAMM members talk about it as a conscious, strategic measure to protect themselves.

The strategic deployment of public identity is evident right across FAMM’s diverse membership. LGBTI women are deciding when to express or hide their sexuality; Muslim women are deciding when and where to wear a hijab; indigenous women who are legally defined as “housewives” or “unemployed” are getting their status changed to “fisherwomen” to gain economic rights; and those in positions of religious leadership use this identity to be safer as activists.

“I used to think that activism means that a person must be visible to lead on the front lines. However, with the growing technology and the dangers that come with it, I learned that anonymity is a right that is important for (some) activists.” (Niken)

Activists moving around rural areas are even conscious of what type of vehicle will make them safer – not only in terms of avoiding accidents, but how they will be perceived in the area: “We choose a rental car such as Pajero. In a car like this, it is easier to enter the remote areas because they think we are investors” (Meta). Choosing to be anonymous to deploy a particular alternative identity that will be less vulnerable – or more powerful – in a given context is widely practiced. FAMM’s model of shared leadership and leading from behind – rather than having a few very visible leaders – is also a way of creating collective safety.

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The safety afforded by anonymity and deploying diverse identities is mirrored in FAMM’s indefinite identity as an institution: semi-structured, decentralized, and not registered, FAMM can provide safe spaces for women dealing with multiple intersecting issues. As a network with minimal resources and staff, FAMM itself can’t provide legal support to members and their organizations, but it uses its connections and communication capacities when needed.

“We don’t have money to transfer people and hire lawyers, but we can connect members to sources, we can listen, and we can write up their stories for the public to know. We write letters to their families. We invite them to our workshops so they feel empowered and feel less lonely. We try to provide moral support, hope, and warmth for their sanity.” (Niken)

As the context becomes more hostile and violent, FAMM members are taking energy and time to strategize around the safety challenges they are facing. They have identified a need to consolidate the network and build wider alliances and links with other movements.

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Specific strategies FAMM has identified for collective safety include:

- Developing security guidelines for members, including digital safety and when not to share specific names, places, and pictures;
- Identifying needs for legal, psychological, and trauma-healing support; making links with relevant individuals and organizations; and forming alliances with human rights initiatives;
- Building capacity and training human rights defenders within the FAMM network, including in self-defense for activists;
- Working ‘under the radar’ or ‘using the back door’ to influence power-holders in less visible or confrontational ways, when more direct activism endangers members;
- Educating and organizing locally, within their communities, to create awareness, shared strategies and leadership for action and safety; and
- Documenting what is happening in order to shape media narratives and communicate proactively with journalists and the public.

Activists often work against the grain of gendered norms or ‘invisible power’ related to women that emphasize sacrifice and family duty. Recognizing this, FAMM is developing supportive strategies for sustaining its momentum and membership, as members struggle in the face of stigmatization and threats, along with rejection in their own communities, families, or work places.

FAMM describes this work as the ‘regeneration of activists’, to distinguish it from urgent response, which tends to focus on individuals. Longer-term collective processes of dismantling invisible power, valuing self-care, and building power within aim to strengthen the resilience of existing members and give support to a new generation of activists.

Eva Bande

FAMM activist Eva Bande is a leading campaigner against the land-grabbing, deforestation, and flooding caused by palm oil companies. In 2011, Eva was imprisoned for peacefully organizing against the extractive projects of a national palm oil corporation. The company’s illegal practices were displacing indigenous people, flooding their homes and lands, and as a result causing widespread ill-health. In response, Eva had started the People’s Front for Central Sulawesi Palm Oil Advocacy to organize communities and local farmers to stop the company.

When the Indonesian military got involved and Eva was arrested, FAMM worked with dozens of women’s rights organizations across the country and the Southeast Asia region to mobilize global support to pressure the government for her release. Along with social media campaigns, online petitions and solidarity marches, they leveraged JASS Southeast Asia’s annual One Day, One Voice regional campaign during the global 16 Days of Activism to spotlight the cases of Eva and other activists who had been targeted and/or jailed for their activism. The focus on “Justice for All Women Human Rights Defenders” included art performances, media events, peace marches, dialogues, bazaars, film screenings, and lantern lightings in Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Thailand, Timor L’este, and the Philippines.

FAMM’s efforts on Eva’s behalf included regular prison visits, letters, and direct assistance to her family members. While international protection networks and other human rights groups supported Eva with legal assistance and other resources, FAMM made sure her emotional well-being and family were supported. Eva was released in December 2014



VI. LEARNING FROM FAMM'S EXPERIENCE

What lessons can FAMM's experience offer to others, in Indonesia and around the world, about making and sustaining movements of women and LGBTI activists, and about keeping members safe in contexts of closing civic space, hostility, and violence?

While it was not created with a linear process or plan, it is possible to **identify key 'active ingredients' of FAMM emergence and success:**

- FAMM fosters a **diverse and inclusive cross-movement identity in its membership** – across gender, ethnicity, class, religion, sexuality, and geography – as the foundation of solidarity and shared vision.
- The network creates **safe spaces within which new trust can grow and members can develop personally and politically.**
- Employing methods of **feminist popular education as the basis of movement building**, FAMM begins from young women's own experiences to develop common understanding and political clarity.
- Analyzing gender and power enables members to create a **shared understanding of their context and the underlying power dynamics shaping it.**
- FAMM members recast the idea of **'leadership' as collective, shared and inclusive**, in place of an individual, male, hierarchical model.
- Through story-telling, writing, and speaking out, **members build confidence, voice and leadership**, both within FAMM and in their local organizations and communities.
- **Building on relationships of trust and solidarity**, FAMM members mobilize politically for collective power and safety.

Five Key Lessons from FAMM

In the dynamic interaction between these elements within FAMM, five important lessons stand out. These may guide others who aspire to support activism in hostile contexts.

Inclusive membership and solidarity

Long-term investment in people and their capacities for collective action is essential. FAMM's success is due in large part to its commitment to supporting and consolidating a new generation of young women activists from diverse backgrounds with an intersectional approach that links their issues and identities within a collective culture. The formation and 'regeneration' of activists, and strengthening their solidarity, is in itself a strategy of protection.

Voice and leadership

In traditional and patriarchal contexts, where young women are expected to remain silent and passive, and where new fundamentalist narratives related to gendered and sexual norms are gaining ground, FAMM's emphasis on building women's self-confidence and communication skills has been vital. Members have gradually developed their voices and the capacities to express themselves more freely and effectively in their families, communities, public spaces and the media. FAMM's model of shared leadership and solidarity reduces the risk of attacks on individual leaders.

Facilitation and mentoring

Movement-building processes need continuous support from experienced facilitators and mentors with a long-term vision and a deep understanding of power. FAMM activists and leaders serve as mentors for one another, and so help to model and nurture transformative power in all its dimensions: *power within*, *power with*, *power for* and *power to*. This kind of sustained accompaniment is vital for movement building.

Knowledge and vision

Building transformative power and taking action are rooted in the ability to create knowledge and envision change. FAMM's investment in capacities for critical understanding, imagination, and strategic vision have been vital in exposing the impacts of invisible power and oppressive norms, questioning dominant narratives, and articulating alternatives. Safe spaces, popular education, and power analysis are not only central in this process of cultivating knowledge and vision, but also enable risk analysis and the development of strategies for collective safety.

Collective power and safety

Backlash and threats can be a sign of strength and success – a response to challenges and changes to the status quo – rather than of weakness. In response, movements and networks are organizing and mobilizing solidarity around shared goals, mutual support and an analysis of risk to create bottom-up strategies for greater collective power and safety. FAMM's activism and unity gives them political strength, and their political solidarity in turn provides collective safety: resisting the stigmatization that isolates activists; strategically deploying identities depending on the context; activating community support in cases of threat; building their own power to protect themselves; and subverting individualistic models of leadership.

Through FAMM's sustained movement-building processes, members have developed a shared, critical understanding of the issues they face and a sense of trust and solidarity across diverse identities. The strength of this collective identity and commitment to an alternative vision and strategic movement leadership, are vital forms of resilience and resistance, of collective safety, and of political strength.

“A while ago, I saw myself as the seed. ... But when I knew about FAMM, I grew. We grow together and become tree with strong roots. The tree produces another seed and becomes another tree.... We have to work with love and passion and share this with our community and always grow and become a big tree and produce more seeds.” (Pipi)

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This report is based on extensive reflection, testimony, and written input from FAMM members and supporters, gathered through interviews, workshops, an action research project, blogs, and documents such as proposals and reports. Quotations in this report are from the documents listed here, and from research interviews with FAMM members (unpublished).

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JASS (Just Associates) is an international network of activists, popular educators, and scholars in 26 countries working to strengthen and amplify the voice, visibility, and collective power of women for a just and sustainable world for all. Grounded in the Global South, JASS equips, accompanies and amplifies grassroots women activists and organizations with the tools, connections and resources they need to scale up their demands and solutions to problems of inequality and violence. We focus our work with women and organizations on the frontlines of crises and change (indigenous, rural, LGBTQ, young and poor women) in Mesoamerica, Southern Africa and Southeast Asia. While they rarely have a seat at the decision-making table, they are leading communities and building innovative solutions to the multiple crises in the world – often at great risk.

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