MAKING ALL
VOICES COUNT

A GRAND CHALLENGE
FOR DEVELOPMENT

Building safe spaces to support young women's participation in local governance in Indonesia

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Summary

This practitioner research, carried out by women's empowerment organisation FAMM Indonesia, brings the voices of young women – a group consistently excluded from decision-making spaces about the allocation of local government resources – into the conversation about social accountability.

Barriers to young (especially unmarried) women's participation in public spaces include the prevailing view that doing so violates social norms, young women's often low level of education, and family expectations. Many young women have internalised their marginalisation and lack the confidence to participate in community forums.

This paper describes participatory action research carried out in partnership with eight grassroots Indonesian women's NGOs. Preliminary focus group discussions laid the foundation for a series of movement-building initiative workshops to strengthen rural young women's leadership capacity, encourage critical awareness and develop their roles as community organisers.

Young women's social engagement can generate criticism and backlash, which may lead to their losing interest in public forums. As well as empowering participation in formal meetings, the research suggests that young women can overcome closed spaces through building on informal relationships and collaborations. And young women's involvement in producing creative content (print, audio and multimedia) for use in community organising is used to strengthen their self-esteem and abilities.

The paper ends with a reflective conversation between Niken Lestari of FAMM and Francesca Feruglio of MAVC. They discuss the kind of capacity-building needed to enable young women to overcome barriers to their engagement in local governance spaces, and thus fulfil their own declared potential to contribute much more to the development of their communities.

Key themes in this paper

- Young women's participation in local government forums
- Power analysis and power mapping
- Intersectionality – how social identities overlap with related power systems
- Feminist popular education
- Movement-building and collaboration

The research offers important insights on accountability from the margins. It emphasises the personal and political changes that necessarily precede the expanded citizen engagement that is often assumed to underpin accountability initiatives.

Setting the scene for practitioner learning

Making All Voices Count (MAVC) is a citizen engagement and accountable governance programme. Its Research, Evidence and Learning component, led by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), focuses on building an evidence base on what works in technology for voice, transparency and accountability, how it works, and why (McGee *et al.* 2015). The programme's practitioner research and learning grants give transparency and accountability practitioners funds and mentoring support to provide them with the space and capabilities to explore key questions that will enable them to better implement their governance projects. Most, but not all, of these practitioners are using tech-enabled approaches. This real-time applied research contributes to project learning and improved practice.

The practitioner research and learning grants support grantees to form their own learning and judgements, and the programme's series of practice papers is part of this process. Practice papers document the process of practitioner research and learning from the perspectives of both the grant recipients and the programme. They are co-produced, and intended to prompt critical reflection on key learning questions that arise from the process of the research.

This practice paper focuses on MAVC-funded practitioner research carried out by FAMM

Indonesia (*Forum Aktivis Perempuan Muda – Young Women Activists Forum*), a network of women activists that strengthens the capacity of young women organisers across Indonesia. The research process, coordinated by Niken Lestari, aimed at understanding the barriers young women face to participating in local decision-making in rural Indonesia. It involved young women across the country in analysing the systematic nature of their exclusion from local governance spaces.

The research fed directly into FAMM's strategic planning for strengthening young women's capacity to advocate for themselves, and offers important insights on accountability from the margins. It emphasises the personal and political changes that necessarily precede the expanded citizen engagement that is often assumed to underpin accountability initiatives.

This paper summarises the process and findings of FAMM Indonesia's practitioner research, and includes insights from a conversation about the process between Niken Lestari and Francesca Feruglio, who managed FAMM Indonesia's practitioner research grant. Following a presentation of the research, its findings and how they fit with FAMM's approach to movement-building, Lestari and Feruglio reflect critically on how issues of power shape young women's individual and collective participation in village-level decision-making.

What does FAMM do and what was the purpose of the research?

Women's public participation

FAMM is a grassroots women's rights organisation which recognises that governance cannot be responsive and accountable if citizens, including young women, cannot participate. Across Indonesia, women's participation in the politics and justice sectors is very low. For example, data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS 2015) show that:

- of 100 village heads, 94% were men and only 6% were women
- none of Indonesia's 34 provinces was led by a woman
- in 511 municipalities / cities in Indonesia, there were only 24 female mayors and regents
- none of the ten leaders of the Supreme Court was female
- of nine leaders of the Constitutional Court, only one was female.

Further, few women work in the public sphere, with most engaged in unpaid domestic work. There are also high levels of child marriage (UNICEF 2016) – between 15 and 32% in the eight provinces where the research was carried out – and girls stay in formal education for much less time than boys and men. All these factors reinforce young women's exclusion from decision-making forums at village level, which in turn reinforces their exclusion in other areas of life such as education and employment. Lack of participation and engagement is particularly acute for young people, who constitute around two-thirds of the labour force (ILO 2015).

Against this backdrop, there have been some recent changes in governance intended to make village-level decision-making in Indonesia more 'participatory' for all citizens. The 'Village Law', seen by some as the most progressive policy in the history of local governance in Indonesia, establishes and funds village authorities to govern through community initiatives based on both rights and traditions. Village government has the authority and resources necessary to govern its own affairs, and there are spaces within this structure for citizen participation in, and oversight of, local governance. This is a vision of village governance "based on the principles of: legal certainty; orderly governance; orderly public interest; openness; proportionality; professionalism; accountability; effectiveness and efficiency; local wisdom; diversity; and participation" (Republic of Indonesia 2014: Article 24).

As well as the Village Law, since 2015 the Ministry of Villages, Development of Disadvantaged Regions and Transmigration has been recruiting and providing capacity-building for rural advisors in several areas in Indonesia, to encourage members of marginalised populations to participate in public forums, supported by regional and national NGOs. This is an important opportunity to reform power relations by channelling resources to build young women's capacity to participate in each region.

But how do young women engage with these possibilities for increased citizen involvement and voice? This report illustrates that systematic barriers prevent them from taking advantage of opportunities to participate in community decision-making structures, and reflects on how one NGO is working to overcome these barriers and ensure the voices of these marginalised citizens can be heard in local governance.

What is FAMM Indonesia?

FAMM Indonesia is a youth-led grassroots organisation which is associated with the international women-led human rights network Just Associates Indonesia (JASS).[1] FAMM Indonesia organises young women activists through feminist popular education, aiming for the sustainability of an independent and gender-equal grassroots women's movement. It does this by establishing cross-movement and multi-generational dialogue to strengthen young women's leadership.

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1 FAMM Indonesia was formerly known as Just Associates Indonesia; it became FAMM in late 2012. Just Associates is a "network of activists, popular educators and scholars in 31 countries [which] work[s] to ensure women leaders are more confident, better organized, louder and safer as they take on some of the most critical human rights issues of our time", https://justassociates.org/en/about-us

Feminist popular education and intersectionality

Popular education is an approach to learning, articulated by Brazilian educator Paolo Freire (1970), in which participants collectively and critically examine their everyday experiences. It raises consciousness for organising and building movements in the interests of acting on injustice, with a political vision for advancing the interests of the most marginalised.[2]

Building on Freire's ideas, **feminist popular educators** identify multiple, intersecting markers of oppression, including gender, class, sexuality, age, ability, nationality, location and ethnicity. They recognise that the private sphere is often the primary force shaping women's oppression.

Intersectionality describes how these social identities intersect and overlap with related systems of oppression, domination or discrimination.[3]

To ensure that young women have a stronger voice and to increase their participation in public decision-making, FAMM –whose members are found in 30 provinces – brings together grassroots women's groups from across Indonesia. They are young activists and organisers, belonging to different classes and social groups, working in community-based organisations on a range of development and rights-based issues. They include young indigenous rural women and Muslim women, as well as lesbian, bisexual, transsexual and intersex women. Through FAMM Indonesia, members gain the opportunity to participate in training and workshops, strengthening their advocacy and organising skills, and applying a gender perspective to their work.

Research aims

FAMM Indonesia used its practitioner research grant from MAVC to conduct self-critical reflection among its members regarding their organising efforts and the barriers they face to participating in village governance structures against the backdrop of contextual change. Improving young women's understanding of their systemic exclusion, and strengthening their analysis of it, enables them to overcome that exclusion and contributes to building more responsive and accountable governance.

FAMM's research also shines a light on two related areas:

- strategies of young women activists in organising a change-enabling environment
- ways in which young women activists have been, and would like to be, involved in collective action to participate in public consultation and accountability processes.

Lessons and evidence obtained through this research (FAMM 2017) are already helping activists and organisers to improve the impact of FAMM Indonesia's work, as well as providing broader contributions to debates on how the government can fulfil its responsibilities to citizens.

Conclusions from existing research

FAMM Indonesia's research explores various challenges and opportunities experienced by young women when participating in village public forums. It builds on FAMM's own practice, but also on several broad propositions based on conclusions from existing research on women's participation in Indonesian governance (Listyaningsih 2010; Kalyanamitra 2011; Agnes *et al.* 2016; Hivos 2016; Pattiro 2016), as follows:

- Participation is part of good governance practice, and is not only about presence and consultation, but also about the rights of citizens in expressing the aspirations, ideas, needs and interests of their community in order to be adopted into policy.
- Village planning and development meetings need to be a space for marginalised people to enter the arena of development planning.
- Marginalised groups need to experience capacity-building in order to influence and get involved in determining policy through active community forums.
- Young citizens need to have awareness and understanding that they are a part of a community with the power to engage in the political process and decision-making together with government.

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2 This definition is derived from that used by Just Associates, justassociates.org/en/feminist-popular-education
3 US professor Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term 'intersectionality' and brought the concept to wider attention, http://geekfeminism.wikia.com/wiki/Intersectionality

Methodology: participatory action research and feminist movement-building

FAMM's research was conducted using a participatory action research approach[4] that combined surveys, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. A key feature of participatory action research is that it involves community members as researchers, who form part of the team carrying out a collective enquiry. The process of studying, sharing control of data collection and analysis, and critically reflecting makes the issues under discussion become a common concern, which forms the basis for action.

Stages of FAMM's research process

- Submission of proposal to MAVC – with broad research questions.
- Consolidation workshop – held in April 2016 with participation by 30 FAMM members from 21 provinces. It decided criteria for the selection of eight provinces, and mapped the research framework and process.[5]
- Identification of participants – FAMM's current members identified potential research participants among young girls in their constituencies. Some were their colleagues, others were from their villages.
- Survey – conducted to gather quantitative data on 168 young women activists (e.g. age, education, religion, marital status) and their engagement with local decision-making forums.
- Focus group discussions – involving 100 women, held as part of an ongoing movement-building process.
- In-depth interviews – with 45 people (29 women and 16 men).
- Discussion of findings and collective learning – in a workshop setting, facilitators used the issues identified in the interviews and focus group discussions to ground the concepts of participation and accountability in the daily experiences of young women as they encounter social barriers to participation in governance.
- Learning outputs – including case studies, videos and written reports highlighting the issues exposed by participants and the discussions around them.

The research process employed by FAMM Indonesia aimed to strengthen the feminist movement-building work that the organisation already undertakes. Participatory research recognises knowledge and reality as social constructions. Therefore it intends to change who can produce and use knowledge, as well as challenge systems of injustice through collective analysis and knowledge creation that generate new awareness, which is in turn used to develop more effective strategies. This research therefore enabled FAMM and its partners to develop a strategy for future organising work.

The workshop model that FAMM Indonesia already uses in its movement-building work was put to use during this research, to help participants explore the different dimensions of power that influenced their ability to participate in local decision-making structures. Developed by JASS, and discussed in detail below, the model starts with a focus on developing power within the self, followed by building power with other people with a shared vision, then transforming this to build a collective agenda, developing power to change established ways of thinking.

FAMM uses this process to illuminate young women's experience of power and power relations. The approach not only aids analysis of the ways they can be obstructed from decision-making as young women, but also helps build a sense of how power can be used positively to bring about change.

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4 For more on participatory action research, see Kemmis and McTaggart (2005)
5 The research was conducted in eight provinces in partnership with eight local NGOs: Pusat Studi Nagari (West Sumatra); Riau (RUPARI); Fahmina Institute (West Java); SPPQT (Central Java); Yayasan Palung (West Borneo); AMAN Kaltim and Perempuan AMAN) (East Borneo); Humanum (Maluku); and Alpen Sultra (Southeast Sulawesi).

Summary of findings: barriers to participation faced by young women

The research found that young women's participation in local decision-making is often tokenistic because of a number of barriers they face, either in accessing decision-making spaces or in making their voices heard.

Social norms / rules governing young women's behaviour

Young women's active participation in citizens' forums is often questioned and belittled, with the result that most of them choose to remain silent. People often disapprove of young women's contributions and see them as overstepping the authority of village officials. As a result, they may not be invited to the next meeting.

I often feel intimidated, despite the fact that we can contribute to the village. People are afraid to involve me, they are afraid of new things. Often when I was at home, I felt like I was an outsider. If I appear in the village, I feel like I am a stranger. – Maria, West Sumatra

There are many [different kinds of] government financial aid [for example, in this case, a small budget for a community Independence Day celebration]. If we ask about how this money will be distributed, the village officials immediately ask: "Why do you question it? Who is your father?" If women actively ask about village policy, we are immediately labelled as women who do not have things to do. Consequently, women are 'lazy' if they get involved in village activities. We just want to have transparency, and not judge people. But this is how the village officials think. – Sri, West Sumatra

At a village forum that I attended, village officials conveyed the details of the budgetary needs, without opening a discussion with people who attended. I disagreed. Supposedly, the details of the budget are made with the people, so that it is more open and transparent. But the suggestion

was ignored by the village officials. In the end, I did not receive any further invitation to attend a village meeting. – Risma, West Java

When women are invited to attend, they are expected not to say anything, not to ask anything, and not to submit proposals of group interest. When young women do the opposite, they are seen as violating social norms. These norms underpin expectations about young women's roles and capabilities, and underpin the other barriers they face. Not least of these is the common view that unmarried women lack the social status needed to participate in public forums.

Marital status

In rural villages, decision-making forums, including governmental, indigenous and religious forums, are dominated by men. These include the planning and development meetings (*Musrenbang*) that are designed to open up spaces for community members to participate in village planning. When women are present in these community forums, they are generally married and tend to be older. Young, unmarried women are often not viewed as adults, and they are perceived as lacking the capacity to participate in such structures.

Public acceptance is crucial in supporting motivation to participate in a public forum. Therefore, public opinion about 'maturity' in relation to marital status is an important factor in discouraging young women from coming forward. Older, married women tend to dominate various activities in the village compared with their younger, unmarried counterparts; this is reinforced by cultural norms. Motherhood also conveys additional status, impacting on the social position of women without children.

The women involved in various activities in the village are mostly adult and married women; rarely are young women involved. In the village, there is a customary rank called Mata Ina, which

Some young women do not dare to speak in public, do not feel they have knowledge of village policies, and are concerned about making mistakes. In addition, there is a view in the community that citizen spaces such as the Musrenbang *are a forum for "smart, brainy and important people", those with education, jobs and good positions in society.*

gives married women specific responsibilities in rituals, and a role in indigenous institutions. Unfortunately, unmarried women have no privileges under Mata Ina. – Alfons, Maluku

One of the institutions at village level intended to enable greater participation of women is the Family Welfare Movement (Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga, PKK), created in 1984 by a decree of the then Minister of Home Affairs. In reality most PKK members are married women, and its leadership structure is determined by their husband's position in the village government. However, in some contexts there are opportunities for young women to participate in the PKK.

The importance attributed to marital status is reflected in the laws relating to marriage and divorce, which also affect the social status and position of women. One of the specific barriers faced by divorced women in a village in West Kalimantan is adat buang, the obligation for a woman to pay a fine if she divorces her husband. If a man divorces his wife, he has no obligation to pay a fine. This makes women without productive work try to survive in 'terrible' marriages.

Women involved in activities outside the house in the evenings – unless they are attending a religious forum – are also considered to be potentially involved in sexual misconduct. So the involvement of young women in citizens' forums, which are usually held at night, often causes negative labelling by community members, preventing or weakening their contributions.

Sex outside marriage is considered a disgrace to the family and society. There are many child marriages, with young people coerced by their families into marriage to avoid the associated shame of pre-marital sex and pregnancy. Early marriage and pregnancy often lead to young women dropping out of school and being precluded

from accessing further educational and job opportunities, which in turns hampers their ability to participate meaningfully in decision-making forums, where a certain level of education is generally expected.

Education and capacity

The low level of education and capacity of young women have been used as excuses not to involve them in the *Musrenbang* – despite the fact that capacity is something that can be developed. Many women have internalised their marginalisation, and have come to lack confidence to participate in the community forums. Therefore young women need capacity-building to strengthen their knowledge and skills in order to participate in the citizens' forums that are available. Without a systematic increase in capacity, young women's voices will remain unheard, and they will be unable to participate and take the lead in representing their own interests.

In some villages where women were better educated, they participated far more. For example in Samajaya village, Southeast Sulawesi, one of the requirements to become a village official is a high school diploma certificate, and most of those who graduate from high school in Samajaya are women. Few men graduate from high school as most choose to work as fishermen, and boys tend be away fishing with their fathers for long periods. Men are rarely involved in meetings, which are held during the day; they sail until the afternoon, and women manage village activities and meetings.

Confidence

Some young women do not dare to speak in public, do not feel they have knowledge of village policies, and are concerned about making mistakes. In addition, there is a view in the community that

citizen spaces such as the *Musrenbang* are a forum for "smart, brainy and important people", those with education, jobs and good positions in society. Young women who feel inexperienced about speaking in public spaces and do not have leadership capacity feel discouraged and afraid to participate.

I never express an opinion in the forum, not yet. I don't have the courage. I am afraid to speak. Of course I have good purpose, but I am still unable to arrange my message. – Masni, Riau

Family support

In addition to lack of confidence, young women's participation in citizens' forums can be undermined by family members, who feel that such activities do not contribute to the family's earnings. Being married is considered more economically rewarding than organising the community. Women's political activities can represent an extra time burden, potentially competing for time with their domestic duties and the kind of community work that is more closely associated with their reproductive roles.

There is problem of support as well, lack of family support. "Why should you join it? It is better for you to have a husband," they said. – Diana, East Kalimantan

Cica's experience illustrates well how married women still face barriers to participating in community activities if they do not have the support of their husbands. Cica explained that when she did not receive an allowance from her organising work outside her village, her husband became angry. According to him, she had made a sacrifice by leaving her family for a few days to represent her village, so she should have received some reward in cash. As a result, he has now forbidden her from remaining in the village organisation.

Using power analysis to make sense of barriers to participation

The research team used power analysis to highlight the different forms of power, visible and invisible, that hinder women's meaningful participation in decision-making. Power analysis was used to enable young women to understand the ways in which people who are more powerful can use their power to obstruct the participation of young women in forums.

- Visible barriers – e.g. meeting times that suit men's schedules and needs; women not being invited to meetings; stigmatising of women who do participate in public forums.
- Invisible barriers – social beliefs and norms that powerfully limit women to acting within the boundaries of their reproductive function within the family – e.g. women's participation in meetings limited to arranging logistics rather than contributing to decision-making; women who try to engage in formal meetings and spaces being considered as violating a village's authority.

Understanding power relations and dynamics in rural areas is important in analysing how individuals and groups influence decision-making forums. Unequal power is more pronounced between the generations, sexes and social groups in rural than in urban areas. Most of the problems and challenges experienced by young women today – child marriage, sexual harassment, gender discrimination – were also experienced by the older generation.

In their research training workshop and focus group discussions, the young women conducted a mapping of the power holders who influence young women's participation and the representation of their interests. This helped them to decide which people they would collaborate with, in what capacity, in which arena, and how to share responsibilities. They also used the JASS movement-building model described below to help them understand how power can be transformed for good.

Intersectionality as a way to situate women's participation in decision-making

Together with power analysis, research participants also applied an intersectionality approach to understanding and exploring their own situations. Intersectionality is a tool for analysis that addresses multiple discrimination and helps participants to understand how different sets of identities impact on access to rights and opportunities (AWID 2004).

Factors such as marital status, age and education constitute different layers of identity that in turn shape women's ability to participate effectively in local decision-making spaces. Using this lens, the participants identified the following identities.

- Being a woman, and being her own self – the most significant and basic identity that shapes a young woman's experience of participation. Women are controlled and overpowered by their surroundings, whether by the customary system, religion or politics. All their activities and even their appearance are strongly determined by how other people view her.
- Being young – young women's lack of capacity influences their low self-esteem, meaning they cannot find the courage to voice their needs and represent their interests during the processes of village planning and development, or in other public forums. Community views that see young women's participation as inappropriate and as challenging community norms also severely limit their ability to speak out publicly.
- Being a family member – society views marriage as the most important and economically beneficial state for young women, compared with community activities. Women's caring activities extend into the community and are conducted without recompense, because of the cultural understanding that this is an extension of their reproductive roles.

- Being a community member – women understand the opportunity community organising offers them in terms of developing their abilities and enabling them to contribute to the improvement of other women's conditions. However, society still strongly believes that the organising work done by young women does not make any direct contribution to public development in rural areas, or to the individual lives of women. Becoming a community organiser or facilitator does not convey the power or social status comparable to that of a teacher, doctor or member of the police.

Women struggle to balance their roles relating to reproduction, community activities and production.

- Women as workers – work suitable for woman is related to the household and the 'nurturing economy', for example, working in government-funded pre-school education (PAUD) centres.[6] This work does not have a high social value, nor is it considered as making a significant contribution to the improvement of political and economic systems.
- Woman and other social factors – intersections between individual women and the social dimensions of class and social control result in the suppression of women's aspirations in public forums. This is seen in women's reluctance to speak out publicly. Women with little education and / or whose husbands have low social and economic status have even less access to forums than their more educated, better connected counterparts. Village governments do not see this lack of access as their own failure to be more inclusive, but as demonstrating the inability and unpreparedness of young woman to participate in decision-making forums.

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6 Pre-school education (*pendidikan anak usia dini*, PAUD) is funded by the government through community-level maternal and childhood care centres. The role of PAUD organiser is usually given to a woman – often a civil servant, midwife, or the wife of an influential community member.

FAMM's movement-building: creating safe spaces for participation

FAMM Indonesia's movement-building initiative (MBI) holds workshops for young women in urban and rural areas to strengthen their leadership capacity, encourage critical awareness and develop their capacity to be community organisers. Young women also learn to identify and appreciate the intersectional identity of other participants. By organising MBI workshops, FAMM Indonesia wants to show that intersectionality is not a barrier to building a strong women's movement, but rather in the words of Niken Lestari, the "fabric to build a movement and opportunity to reflect on shared goals".

The MBI workshops involve several modules:

- Sharing personal stories – FAMM Indonesia supports participants in reflecting on the times when they feel most powerful and most powerless. Personal stories are used in an effort to build a safe environment and trust among the participants.
- Women's movement timeline in Indonesia – the women's stories and experiences are then discussed within the context of the history of the women's movement in Indonesia. Small

group discussions are conducted to remember local women leaders at the provincial level, who are often erased from history. This is a way to demonstrate that a feminist perspective is not something foreign and new, but has grown organically from the conditions women face. The exercise also encourages young women to value the community work that they do, even when it is not recognised by society.

- Power analysis – participants are encouraged to learn about (or taught) the different dimensions of power and how power works, and to analyse the situations in which they feel powerful and powerless. Young women then try to build a strategy based on this power analysis to respond to rules, written and unwritten, that hold back their participation in public spaces. They learn that power can transform and empower rather than oppress people. They also learn about their own internalised gender biases, which illuminate why women in positions of power do not always represent the interests of women.
- Feminist leadership – this session challenges the notion that leadership is related to seniority based on age and experience as well as gender. Leadership, according to FAMM Indonesia, does not only refer to leadership associated with positions of authority in community structures; any individual has the capacity to be a leader.

FAMM

When young women engage socially to challenge several intersecting types of power, they challenge the powerful; this generates criticism and even backlash against them. Young women spoke of their sadness, disappointment and anger on being mocked, underestimated and unheard.

- Organising community – this module aims to develop an understanding of how community organising can be used as a strategy for awareness and change, and how it can provide links to other groups and thus to the wider network.
- Popular feminist education – young women are encouraged or helped to understand popular education from a feminist perspective and build critical awareness of other marginalised groups. During this process they become aware that their experiences constitute valid and valuable knowledge. This awareness is a critical point during the journey of deconstructing dominant systems of knowledge creation. When young women become aware that they can have and produce knowledge, they feel more empowered.
- Assertive communication – this challenges the impact of negative social labelling of young women who speak out, which leads to women practising passive communications such as obeying or submitting to others' instructions; avoiding conflict; and choosing not to express their ideas and decisions. Participants reflect on their communication skills and develop their ability to listen to others' statements, articulate ideas and thoughts, find solutions and manage conflict.
- Sexuality – this module, developed by members of FAMM Indonesia, responds to the taboo and lack of knowledge surrounding sexuality. A lack of awareness is maintained by the common perception that sex and sexuality are prohibited subjects, not to be discussed by unmarried or single women. The MBI workshop is a space where everyone can feel secure and comfortable enough to ask questions and learn about sexuality from other participants.

Safe spaces to counter 'power over'

All the modules in the MBI workshop are interrelated and may be modified for different needs, whether for young women or government-level participants. A core factor at the heart of the workshops is building awareness of power. This is achieved using the 'expressions of power' framework.[7] Beginning with the power that participants have within themselves (*power within*), it encourages shared feelings that can support connections and solidarity with others working in organisations that address a range of issues in diverse ways (*power with*). This focus places individual needs and interests within the communal experience, with the idea that such cooperation will strengthen influence and bargaining power (*power to*). Multi-movement activity engenders collective action with an even greater mass to reform the dominant power structure (*power for*).

When young women engage socially to challenge several intersecting types of power, they challenge the powerful; this generates criticism and even backlash against them. Young women spoke of their sadness, disappointment and anger on being mocked, underestimated and unheard. This makes them lose interest and the desire to contribute in public forums – and as a result, many members of FAMM Indonesia try to avoid such forums.

To counter this – and the associated conflict in families and organisations which means that young women are frequently faced with dilemmas where they must make hard choices – FAMM has developed a range of online and offline Safe Space options for women activists to 'accompany' their members during hard times, maintain the spirts of both individual members and groups, and facilitate the collective action of woman activists (Lestari 2015). The Safe Space may be a face-to-face meeting, a phone call, an email or an online chatroom. A 'host' listens to the member with no judgement and no conclusion; the Safe Space does not try to offer solutions. Instead, it offers a place for members to reflect on their own challenges in order to shift their perception of their situation. FAMM Indonesia realises that developing greater

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7 For more on expressions of power, and full definitions of power within, with, to, for and over, see VeneKlasen and Miller (2002).

FAMM

awareness of unequal power relations and changing relationships in one's own personal life to be able to continue organisational and political work is sometimes a difficult, dangerous and long journey. The Safe Space tries to help women during their decision-making processes, to maintain their shared spirit and to act as a resource for the women's movement.

Extended multi-generational dialogue

One of the most important aspects in organising is to obtain support from figures in the women's movement who have themselves experienced similar struggles. In every MBI workshop, FAMM Indonesia includes multi-generational dialogue that involves women from older generations, and the process is adapted to the context and challenges in each region. Participants reflect on the development of the women's movement in the different generations. In one such dialogue it became clear that several problems currently experienced by young women were also experienced by previous generations of activists. Multi-generational dialogue usually encourages the sharing of strategies and building of relationships with older activists to understand obstacles experienced by young women. However, there is still

no sustainable and systematic feedback within this dialogue process, which causes stagnation of the women's movement.

Knowledge and content production

FAMM Indonesia has published three books, mostly in popular narrative form, about young women's experiences in understanding leadership and organising communities. These contrast with information about rural governance and related issues available on websites, which is mostly about government regulations, and written by NGOs in formal language. FAMM Indonesia facilitates the production of creative content in popular language based on this knowledge, for example using audio, visuals and multimedia, which can be used in community organising. Content is also developed for media campaigns for collective action.

Young women themselves are involved in producing this knowledge and soliciting feedback from the audiences they are targeting. FAMM Indonesia has learnt that the process of producing popular knowledge strengthens self-esteem and young women's abilities. When their stories are distributed in public spaces, the young women grow in confidence, knowing that they are being heard.

From safe spaces to claiming a role in decision-making: a conversation with Niken Lestari

Francesca:

Niken, how did the research come about? What was the driving need behind it?

Niken:

We wanted to take stock of our organising work and be able to plan our future strategies better. More specifically, most of FAMM's members have mostly come from urban areas, and we felt the need to engage with young women in rural areas as well. To do so, we required a better understanding of the challenges they face. For example, the focus group discussions highlighted the problem of child marriage and how it relates to participation. This was something new to us because child marriage is particularly acute in rural areas. One of the important aspects that we hadn't figured out previously was the relationship between marriage and a woman's ability to participate in a public space.

Francesca:

Francesca: FAMM works to strengthen the voices of young women in Indonesia, and ensure they are represented in local decision-making. Who were the research participants and what are the issues they face?

Niken:

Participants are young women who work as community organisers or for local community-based organisations, usually on issues such as women's rights and children's development. They want to build their capacity in organising, to become facilitators, and join income-generating activities in order to have a stronger position in their families and communities. One example could be education: at the village level there is limited infrastructure such as schools and transportation, so they would like to participate and demand to have a voice in improving education.

Francesca:

How did the research and movement-building process allow young women to tackle these issues?

Niken:

The MAVC research started at a critical moment because we needed a reflection on our activities and programmes, and what was coming next. First, we saw that having focus group discussions as part of the research helped us ground our work in the real issues that women face. We thought that building on this using MBI workshops to identify relevant issues that participants want to discuss, and to provide them space to get to know each other, would build their skills to tackle the issues – and ensure a high quality of data. To achieve this it was crucial to ensure participants were able to speak freely and critically, and that they understood what FAMM is doing, what tools were being used. This safe space allowed them to develop meaningful insights on their challenges.

Central elements of our strategy, including the research, are the creation of a safe space for storytelling and solidarity. We share our personal stories, related to our experience as young woman in family and society. We try to express powerful and powerless moments, and that's where we try to gain understanding of perspectives, similar positions and similar experiences. The experience of being powerless is a real element for unity, as is the need for a safe space where empathy and support can be found. Women organisers feel threatened, tired, intimidated and don't know how to get their energy back. Stories that are shared and heard provide encouragement and support. Following storytelling, we analyse the stories participants present through power analysis. For it to resonate with participants, we need to start from real issues people face through storytelling,

Francesca:

A key moment of the empowerment cycle is when women are aware that their experience is part of a wider knowledge and that they are able to have and produce knowledge. In your experience, this usually happens in self-organised safe spaces. Through these spaces, young women no longer focus on their individual needs and interests, but rather, translate their individual experience into a collective vision. These spaces contribute to building a bargaining power position to initiate a change. Can you give an example of this type of change?

Niken:

The research showed that young women have created self-help groups and learning spaces outside the village governmental structure – ranging from Islamic prayer gatherings and Sunday school meetings to cooperatives and reading, art and conservation groups with open and unrestricted membership. The activities conducted by these community groups are varied – they include welfare surveys, health advice, birth certificate management advice, book collection and cooperative construction. The purpose of this kind of community organising is not to create rivalry between the groups under the village government structure, but to create an alternative space to express and develop the capacity that young women are unable to gain through village-level systems of local government. We found this across all research locations.

A key example and a major source of inspiration is PEKKA,[8] the women's empowerment organisation from which FAMM emerged as a branch. PEKKA works to empower women household heads, who are too often marginalised and excluded from decision-making, and over time was able to create a safe space for these women, who then embarked on a collective process of self-organising. For instance, they built cooperatives and became involved in workshops and income-generating activities. This led to a change in public perceptions of women: people started to see them as smart, resourceful persons, and the village governments began to look at PEKKA's members as community leaders, and invite them to forums – something that never happened before because they were widows, and stigmatised. There are cases where female heads of household were elected as village leaders and to the village council. FAMM hopes to follow a similar path. To draw from the learning of PEKKA, a strong part of our activities focuses on intergenerational dialogue where our members can learn from older women's struggles and successes.

Francesca:

With regard to formal spaces for participation, some forums like the PKK (Family Welfare Movement) enable the participation of women such as wives of community leaders, and elderly women. They tend to reproduce the same power dynamics – women are seen in their household and reproductive roles. Thus while the PKK can be seen as an entry point for women in formal spaces, a shift is needed in perceiving women as citizens with individual autonomy. How do you tackle this? How do you try to influence those who are already in positions of privilege and power?

Niken:

Some of our members are working together so we try to influence these women with our analysis of power, we try working with them. We invite them to our MBI trainings, and also have personal interactions and work with PKK itself. Some of the participant researchers are members of PKK and involved in local NGOs – so we invited them to discuss how we can work together on certain issues. For example, in one of the villages where FAMM members work, the area has a high rate of infant and maternal mortality. We approached the leader of the PKK and introduced their members to the root causes: child marriage, low education, etc. It changed the perspective of PKK leaders. PKK together with FAMM members organised a space for young women to learn about sex education in a way that is accessible – in the public library with internet access and resources.

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8   Female Headed Family Empowerment Programme (*Pemberdayaan Perempuan Kepala Keluarga*, PEKKA), www.pekka.or.id

We realised that there was a lot of hidden politics in village governance and the invited spaces are only consultative, but have no decision-making power. So our position is now different. Our strategy is to strengthen informal relations and build informal spaces where decisions are actually taken.

Francesca:

And when formal spaces are inaccessible to young women, due to education or marital status for instance, how do you seek engagement with the government?

Niken:

I had an ideal concept of participation – provide encouragement and facilitation to bring more young women to formal forums. But actually, when we started the research process, we found out that young women just don't feel comfortable and useful in those forums. Also, we realised that there was a lot of hidden politics in village governance and the invited spaces are only consultative, but have no decision-making power.

So our position is now different. Our strategy is to strengthen informal relations and build informal spaces where decisions are actually taken. We identify actors who are able to facilitate these relationships within the decision-making process, especially if you are considered an outsider. You may not be able to get to the village leader, but you can approach his wife. In central Java, for instance, our members have a close relationship with the wife of the village leader and that led to getting space in the library. The research suggested ways in which young women can overcome closed spaces by building informal relationships based on empathy with actors close to the authorities. The MBI workshops can also be used as spaces to initiate discussions with village government representatives and public figures, by inviting them as respondents or speakers. This works when the safe space is controlled by young women, and the facilitator is chosen from an organisation with the ability to integrate communication between the young women and the village government.

Francesca:

Based on FAMM's experience so far, what would be needed to strengthen relations between government and young women?

Niken:

Our experience has underscored the need for young women both as citizens and future government officials to have access to capacity-building on leadership and organising. Such collaboration can support community welfare improvements and therefore should not be underestimated by central government. The community benefits from the development of young women and their ability to contribute to community welfare – for example, indirectly tackling early marriage, post-partum death, improvements in the domestic economy, and stronger collaborations between different organisations and sectors. But village government and customary leaders cannot expect technical support from young women without developing their capacity sufficiently.

FAMM Indonesia finds that efforts to improve young women's wellbeing are very important in order to make them more independent and have strong bargaining power in the family and the community. Capacity-building for young women should be accompanied by the development of their economic autonomy and formal education. The opportunity to develop their economic skills is a motivating factor to get more involved in leadership capacity-building.

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About Making All Voices Count

Making All Voices Count is a programme working towards a world in which open, effective and participatory governance is the norm and not the exception. It focuses global attention on creative and cutting-edge solutions to transform the relationship between citizens and their governments. The programme is inspired by and supports the goals of the Open Government Partnership.

Making All Voices Count is supported by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and the Omidyar Network, and is implemented by a consortium consisting of Hivos, IDS and Ushahidi.

Research, Evidence and Learning component

The programme's Research, Evidence and Learning component, managed by IDS, contributes to improving performance and practice, and builds an evidence base in the field of citizen voice, government responsiveness, transparency and accountability (T&A) and technology for T&A (Tech4T&A).

About Making All Voices Count practice papers

The Research, Evidence and Learning component has produced a series of practitioner research and learning grants to support a range of actors working on citizen voice, T&A and governance to carry out self-critical enquiry into their own experiences and contexts. The main output of each grant is what the practitioner learns and applies to their own practice. Practitioners can also decide to produce their own written outputs. The purpose of the practice papers, written on completion of each grant, is to capture the essence of that learning process through a reflective dialogue between programme staff and funded partners, to share with a wider audience of peer practitioners and policy-makers.

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