

# EMPOWERING WOMEN

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Act locally, think nationally.

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# EMPOWERING WOMEN

A common criticism of traditional approaches to capacity building in international development is a tendency to focus resource inputs on the provision of a narrow set of outputs, such as the delivery of training sessions, in order to show concrete evidence of progress to the client financing the initiative. While it can be satisfying for the implementing agency to report back on a job well done by utilizing this approach (hundreds trained, courses delivered, minds exposed to new ways of working), at the end of the day such efforts can leave open to question the ultimate impact of the work conducted on participants' well-being. It can also mean missing opportunities to institutionalize new skills, systems and approaches through policy measures that can guarantee a much wider impact. This challenge applies equally to efforts to improve health service delivery as it does to reforming education systems or expanding access to clean water. Critically, it also applies to interventions to promote the economic and social empowerment of women.

Fortunately, new approaches are beginning to emerge that illustrate how investments in capacity building (improving the performance of people and organizations through training, coaching and advisory services) can yield much broader, deeper and more sustainable change that can have a tangible impact on women's well-being for the long-term. In Cowater's experience, this model can best be captured by combining the phrase "act locally, think nationally" with three critical interventions: strengthening the policy advocacy skills of local organizations, influencing local change agents, and utilizing data as a tool for introspection and widespread take-up of 'smart practices' defining more effective ways of working.

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**“In pursuit of these complementary objectives, we have adopted the “act locally, think nationally” model and its three associated pillars, and we have already begun to see its results.”**

In Indonesia, Cowater first put this model into practice through the Government of Canada-financed BASICS project. This six-year initiative sought to accelerate the achievement of critical Millennium Development Goals (since followed by the Sustainable Development Goals) in the areas of health and education in the provinces of North and Southeast Sulawesi, a region in the centre of the country’s vast archipelago. The project’s success in driving improvements to minimum service standards at the district level, which were then scaled up through policy reforms at the national level, provided a clear rationale for replicating such approaches into subsequent development programs.

Australia’s MAMPU program, an AUD 103 million, eight-year initiative currently being implemented by Cowater across Indonesia, represented exactly the right opportunity to build on BASICS’ achievements and smart practices.

Recognized as perhaps the world’s largest bilateral women’s empowerment program currently underway, our MAMPU team is working with a wide variety of local organizations to reduce poverty through empowering Indonesian women from multiple angles:

- *Increasing social protection and access to employment*
- *Improving maternal/reproductive health*
- *Reducing domestic violence*
- *Increasing women’s roles in parliament.*

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# POLICY ADVOCACY

**“Such engagement can also serve to build relationships between civil society and government actors.”**

Often narrowly focused on grassroots service delivery, local community service organizations, or CSOs, in Indonesia are not actively engaged in efforts to influence policy at the district, provincial, or national levels. While the national level can easily seem too distant, both physically and psychologically, to warrant much attention in a vast and heavily decentralized nation such as Indonesia, this distance can be narrowed through strategic policy engagement at the local level by a multitude of like-minded actors that can influence discussions up the chain. Importantly, such engagement can also serve to build relationships between civil society and government actors often defined more by animosity than cooperation. To ensure this engagement is well received, local policy-makers and decision-makers must therefore also be sensitized on the value of community engagement and on means through which the interests expressed by CSOs can be channeled into policy discussions or specific actions by any of the three primary levels of government. For these reasons, MAMPU has been working with both CSOs and policy-makers in close collaboration to strengthen the impact of CSO engagements in the policy-making process.

On Ambon Island in eastern Indonesia, women have traditionally had limited roles in decision making at the village level, and locals have had few economic opportunities given the remote nature of the island. This began to change in 2014 following the Government of Indonesia's adoption of the Village Law, which promised to enhance the authority of village administrations while also increasing their access to public funding. However, with few locals having experience working with these new formal administrative mechanisms and given women's pre-existing limited roles as decision-makers, there were no guarantees such decentralization would boost women's economic and social well-being. For this reason, MAMPU partner Yaysan Walang Perempuan (YWP) initiated a capacity building program to assist traditional leaders with activating indigenous governance institutions, facilitating women's involvement in village level planning and budgeting processes, and supporting the documentation of local governance customs and traditions. Throughout this process, YWP worked closely with district governments, provincial planning officials of BAPPEDA, and the district/city level Women's Empowerment and Village Community Empowerment Office. Following the adoption of a planning module in the program's initial five indigenous villages reaching over 900 women and 1300 men, this collaboration with local government institutions led to the replication of this model in 25 other villages in Maluku province.

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# INFLUENCING LOCAL CHANGE AGENTS

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CSOs and community members working collaboratively with local leaders as described above can be particularly influential if the program has identified specific individuals with a proven ability to influence and a commitment to reform. These leaders, whose authority may be formal or informal, will already have in place pre-existing bases of support that can drive momentum to achieve real change. In Indonesian villages, this is often the village ‘headman’ or other traditional leaders. Tapping into such allies is also crucial to overcoming resistance by potential spoilers who benefit from the status quo. In the case of MAMPU, the program draws on local parliamentarians to help navigate the complexities of government decision-making and then works through multiple channels (domestic stakeholders, conveners and power brokers) to reinforce the need for change.

MAMPU’s innovation partner, PEKKA, for instance, is an organization that assists poor women in the provinces of Aceh, West Java, Central Java, West Kalimantan, NTB, NTT and Southeast Sulawesi with their roles and responsibilities as family breadwinners, household managers and decision makers.

Through its work under MAMPU, PEKKA staff members have acknowledged the strong and active involvement of the Director of Social Protection with Indonesia’s Ministry of National Planning (BAPPENAS) as a champion advocating for improved collection of national poverty data on women and men. By engaging such a strategically placed champion and aligning with key influencers in the National Statistics Agency and the Vice President’s Team for the Acceleration of Poverty Reduction Program, PEKKA was able to successfully argue that the instruments used to collect data required modification since poor women often lacked the documentation required to be officially recognized in official statistics. Now more visible due to these changes, women from the poorest households have greater access to government social assistance programs including food and education benefits and health insurance.



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# DATA AS A TOOL FOR INTROSPECTION

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The final pillar of this approach relies on the ongoing collection of robust monitoring and results data from the locations in which interventions are being implemented. Using this data, policy-makers can be informed with real evidence of change and impact, while other communities can readily see the benefits of adopting new practices while adapting them to meet their own needs. Under MAMPU this pillar has been put into practice through a tailor-made and program-wide monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system. It has also been implemented through a user-centered innovation fund designed to support community organizations experiment with creative solutions (prototypes) that have the potential to address the program’s goals in very practical ways at the local level. Data on implementation progress is gathered at least quarterly, based on which prototypes are adjusted and decisions made on the direction of further support from the programme in each case. This includes quantitative results data but also qualitative inputs based on questions asked of implementing partners that are meant to guide their own internal reflections on progress achieved and challenges encountered to date. By collecting robust qualitative and quantitative data in this way the program also ensures that a foundation of empirical evidence is built for reference by other organizations or policy-makers seeking to replicate or scale up the model in question at the local or national levels.

Based on this strategy, MAMPU partner Consortium for Global Concern has been documenting ‘smart practices’ to inform policy-making at the local government level. Innovative interventions documented thus far have ranged from efforts to preserve traditional weaving, improve children’s health and household income through vegetable gardens, and empower women economically through the development of women’s only credit unions. One of these smart practice publications captured the attention of the Government of Indonesia’s Ministry of Village Affairs, which has now indicated interest in adopting the “Women-Friendly Village Approach.” If implemented, a decree reinforcing a requirement for women to sit on local governing bodies, for example, as heads of neighbourhoods which will lead to the elevation of at least 372,000 women into decision-making roles. By working with CSOs to influence policy through the approaches discussed above, MAMPU is highlighting local challenges and opportunities that are now recognized at multiple levels of government while creating conditions for the adoption of relevant policy mechanisms that can achieve real change on a national scale.



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