



Policy Brief 3

Women's Resilience in Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic

INTRODUCTION

One of the findings from a study by Komnas Perempuan titled "Managing Steps in Uncertainty: Strengthening Women's Movement in the COVID-19 Pandemic Era" is women's strong resilience in mitigating the impacts of and adapting to the pandemic, as well as networking with other women (Komnas Perempuan, 2020d). The definition of women's resilience is the ability to cope with and adapt to adverse life events, and to bounce back from such events (Reivich K & Shatté A, 2002). Resilience is observable, yet difficult to measure quantitatively. This policy brief presents four case studies in 2020 to illustrate women's resilience in terms of their courage, perseverance, sensitivity, leadership, negotiation skills, and consistency with the visions and missions of their respective organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic. Komnas Perempuan (The Indonesian National Commission on Violence against Women) gathered the case studies data from online interviews with individual informants, focus group discussions (FGDs), and a situation study on Services for Women Victims of Violence and Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) during the COVID-19 Pandemic (Komnas Perempuan, 2020a). The case studies demonstrate how women deal with the pandemic, the measures taken, and the extent of women's contribution to care for their lives and the lives of their families and communities. World Health Organization highlights that women are the backbone of the health care system, since women make up 70% of health care workers globally (WHO, 2018). In Indonesia, even long before the pandemic, women have already been working as frontline health workers.

The four case studies highlight four focus areas: **(1)** the initiatives of service providers for women victims of violence to continue to protect survivors of violence during the pandemic; **(2)** community-based initiatives in the form of solidarity economy; **(3)** public kitchen initiatives as a buffer for the urban poor; and **(4)** inclusive initiatives by faith-based institutions to engage in humanitarian activities.

INITIATIVES OF SERVICE PROVIDERS: CONTINUE TO OFFER PROTECTION DURING THE PANDEMIC

The first case study highlights Lingkar Belajar Untuk (LIBU) Perempuan in Palu and Yayasan Lingkar Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Anak (LAPPAN) in Ambon, Maluku. Both are private service providers with civil society basis who continue to provide protection for women and children through innovations to withstand the COVID-19 pandemic.

Strengthened volunteer networks and women's leadership. LIBU Perempuan saw the confusion among women and children who have not yet recovered from the multiple disasters of earthquake-tsunami-soil liquefaction (28 September 2018), and they immediately networked with volunteers and 'paralegals' to strengthen the referral system that has existed before the pandemic. Information technology in the form of WhatsApp group was used to strengthen coordination. With the support from the village government, volunteers, and networking with other women, women's leadership emerged in temporary shelters. This, among others, led to the innovation of 'safe house for survivors' managed by the community, complete with supporting schemes for the safety, protection, and fulfillment of basic needs for the victims (Komnas Perempuan, 2020b, 2020c).

Engagement with local institutions. LIBU Perempuan has actively engaged with local institutions and traditional leaders to support the village government. Their effective strategies include the use of concrete evidence of violence as impact from child marriages to educate their partners that such practice is contrary to community values, as well as to demand the village government to play their role in protecting the rights of victims of violence in compliance with the regulations. The active role of the village government has been effective in bringing together the communities and the referral services in dealing with local cases of violence. Information related to violence against women and children were disseminated, including the relevant contact details. The information was put on a banner placed in the village office. Support from families and community were evident from the responses of individual women survivors who came to the village office after learning about the information from the banner. This approach is proven to benefit women directly by providing access to services for protection against violence (Komnas Perempuan, 2020d).

A similar approach was taken by Yayasan Lingkar Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Anak (LAPPAN) in Ambon, Maluku. They continued to identify cases during the COVID-19 pandemic, including those in remote islands/areas. Realizing how smartphone ownership is uneven and internet access does not cover a lot of areas, LAPPAN expanded its network to address cases of violence by collaborating with church-based crisis centers and law enforcement agencies, particularly in identifying the offenders and building a referral system (Komnas Perempuan, 2020b).

Importance of integrated services and recoveries that empower the victims. Simultaneously LAPPAN identified the active and non-active service providers to obtain a more effective referral scheme. LAPPAN worked with P2TP2A, the government centre for integrated services for the empowerment of women and children, to assist the victims from the start of the investigation process with the police up to court hearings. Coordination with the police department would reinforce the family's standing when the offender, usually a 'close person', begins to intimidate the victim, particularly victims of sexual abuse. LAPPAN received online support from the Faculty of Psychology of Universitas Indonesia (UI) in strengthening the capacity to provide psychosocial recovery services. This is particularly in cases of child sexual abuse implicating unwanted pregnancy where advocacy is targeted as such so that girls can return to school after childbirth. At the same time, support systems from closest family members were also established to help with the reproductive health recovery, while support from the community is to ensure that the blame is not put on the victim (Komnas Perempuan, 2020b).

Support for volunteers' capacity building through study forums. Women leaders are also responsive to the importance of capacity building for volunteers. LAPPAN organized a study forum from April to October 2020 with a total of 24 online learning sessions covering new themes with various resource speakers. However, the biggest challenge was the phone and internet access, especially in remote islands and areas where blank spots are prevalent. An example of creative solutions from Seram island was identified, where the cell phone was placed on a tree to allow collective use from a single phone.

LIBU Perempuan and LAPPAN are the two examples of institutions that spearheaded the protection and responses to cases of violence against women. The COVID-19 pandemic did not dampen their spirit. They shifted their services from offline to online (Komnas Perempuan, 2020b). Unequal access to the internet, challenges in applying health protocols, and decrease in the number of volunteers did not discourage their networking. To make their work more optimal, budget support from the government is needed so that non-government service providers such as LIBU Perempuan and LAPPAN could survive and provide benchmarking of women's resilience in the coronavirus pandemic mitigation and adaptation.

SHARING ECONOMY IN THE PANDEMIC: EMPU WOMEN'S SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT

The economic impacts of COVID-19 have caused many families to lose their daily sources of income. EMPU women's solidarity movement successfully used economic-driven activities to reach out to communities in Java and outside Java, such as in Aceh and Central Sulawesi.

Two approaches were rolled out at the same time. **First**, direct donation of 30,000 face masks in March 2020 and foodstuff for children under three and five years old distributed to the elderly, orphans, people with HIV/AIDS, domestic workers, migrant workers, women prisoners, survivors of violence, earthquake-affected IDPs in Central Sulawesi and flood-affected IDPs in Luwu (South Sulawesi), fishers (in Semarang), and women salt-farmer groups in Central Lombok and East Lombok. Also, donation to health care workers/community health clinics in remote and outermost areas in the form of face masks, face shields, and PPEs, in collaboration with the National Disaster Management Agency (BNPb). **Second**, building self-reliance (through provision of tools) by distributing 3,000 bags of seeds to more than 500 women/families, women salt-farmer groups,

survivors of violence, and victims of disaster in Greater Jakarta area (Jabodetabek), East Java, Padang, East Sumba, Central Kalimantan, Central Sulawesi, and Ambon. It also includes organizing 201 women who sell *jamu*, traditional herbal drinks in Tangerang, Yogyakarta and surrounding areas, Batu-Malang, Cilacap, Sumenep (Madura), Palu, and Ambon. This innovation is complemented with quality control measures under *Pamong Jamu* scheme, where regular customers would play a role of quality control (in terms of health protocol and hygiene). EMPU also engaged with suitable partners, namely the Indonesian Food and Drugs Supervisory Agency (BPOM) who can provide technical guidance on hygiene practices, and Yayasan Benih Baik who can provide guidance on accountable funding mechanisms.

In Ambon, efforts to develop *jamu* and food security resulted in connecting communities which were previously segregated. Engagements between the catholic women's community in Lourdes, christian women's community in Waihoka, and muslim women's community in Arbes were established. These engagements were followed by sharing food plants and vegetable seeds between communities. EMPU indirectly succeeded to break the barriers and prejudices inherited from previous conflicts, and the solidarity economy movement has become the medium to make peace stronger.

Accountability: the key to successfully managing volunteers and equitable business.

Transparency in community organization models applied by EMPU turned out to be the key to success as it was suitable to mobilize solidarity economy and women volunteers. Through women's volunteerism model, solidarity economy introduced new values on appreciation and support for marginalized groups. Through access to information technology, market access has enabled *jamu* products to gain added value. Increased income and welfare of women entrepreneurs highlights the success of women in adapting with the pandemic (Komnas Perempuan, 2020d).

PUBLIC KITCHEN: from DOMESTIC KITCHEN to PUBLIC KITCHEN

Another form of resilience was observed in public kitchens, a collective response organized by Solidaritas Pangan Jogja (SPJ). SPJ was originally initiated by women activists who undertook gender-based social mapping analysis on the impacts of the pandemic on women porters, pedicab drivers, peddlers, and scavengers in Yogyakarta (early March 2020). The findings indicated that the most affected groups are the urban poor, informal workers such as small traders, laborers, and scavengers. University students, members of Aisyiyah (women's wings of the Muhammadiyah, one of the two largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia), as well as religious study groups in Gamping and Seyegan took part in this initiative. What started off as the distribution of 50 packets of rice-based meals prepared by domestic (household) kitchen was then followed by other kitchens. Public kitchens in Balirejo were growing and they were managed by women activists, university students, and domestic worker networks to specifically cater to women porters in Beringhardjo market and Giwangan. Target beneficiaries in Prawirotaman, Condong Catur, Wonocatur, and Keparakan area were expanded to also include scavengers and the elderly; there were also the Bongsuwung area kitchen which catered to commercial sex workers, kitchen that catered to female transgender, and the Sembungan area kitchen. Apart from activists, housewives, students, art workers, the urban poor, and regular citizens also joined hands together. Within one month, 15 public kitchens were established, producing 100-200 packets of rice-based meals per day. For more or less 5 months

(March to August 2020), **logistics arrangement, supplies of ingredients, and the organization of SPJ kitchens were managed by volunteers**, including vegetables donated by farmers as well as bags of rice and eggs. The key to successful public fund raising is **transparency and accountability**. Trust was built through coordination meetings held every two weeks as well as accountability reports of donations uploaded to the SPJ website each month. The coordination meetings serve as a bridge that connects the public kitchen, producers (agriculture farmers, animal farmers), and recipients of the rice-based meals (Komnas Perempuan, 2020d).

At the end of 2020, only two public kitchens were still running, i.e. for the elderly and for commercial sex workers, because they essentially provide a lifeline for both groups. **Public kitchen is a common space and a manifestation of collective awareness** to address the issue of food shortage, as well as **a place to meet for people who have been segregated** by social divide and prejudice, such as between women who are active in Islamic prayer group (*majelis taklim*) and commercial sex workers (Komnas Perempuan, 2020d). For those who were not within the reach of the rice-based meals distribution, e.g. small vendors in Parangtritis beach, SPJ distributed local food staples (i.e. rice, sugar, tea, cooking oil). Collaboration between SPJ and Gusdurian Network (an NGO) **provides some land as well as technical assistance** delivered by Kulon Progo farmers to the urban poor and students who were affected by COVID-19 to help them build food security.

Women's resilience is marked by persistence in overcoming numerous challenges, such as funding, management, and social segregation. It is not easy because a pandemic is different from a mere disaster, where there is lack clarity of when the pandemic will end. In terms of management, managing predominantly young volunteers is both a challenge and an opportunity. Social segregation sensitivity is the biggest challenge, not to mention with the additional impacts from movement restrictions which seem to intensify social segregation between local natives and internal immigrants. Large Scale Social Restrictions (PSBB), a legal product that comes with sanctions, caused SPJ to suffer from repressive measures from security forces (April 2020) i.e. dismissing the public kitchens. Nevertheless, persistence (another aspect of women's resilience) prevents SPJ from being discouraged, prompting advocacy that leads to the suspension of such repressive measures (Komnas Perempuan, 2021).

SPJ remained consistent and inserted its agenda in every public kitchen, i.e. monitoring cases of violence against women. Leaflets containing information on the address of service providers for women victims of violence were systematically placed at the time the rice-based meals packets and face masks were distributed in community drop points (Komnas Perempuan, 2020d). As some of the urban poor are non-permanent residents, this has helped to narrow the gap with the local natives in trying to survive and adapting to the impacts of the pandemic.

INCLUSIVE FAITH-BASED MOVEMENT FOR WOMEN AND HUMANITY

Women's leadership in organizations affiliated with religious and faith-based mass organizations has been eminent in responding to the crisis. Women's resilience is highlighted in terms of human rights sensitivity, as the pandemic have caused a crisis that should be viewed as humanitarian disaster which must be addressed without religious discrimination. Media analysis (of online/printed/national TV stations/social media) carried out by Komnas Perempuan in collaboration with Indonesia Indikator suggested that:

Humanitarian aid provided by Aisyiyah and Muslimat/Fatayat (both are the women's wing of the two largest Islamic mass organizations in Indonesia) did not stop at distributing staple commodities, information of health protocols, and face masks and PPEs. Upon a mapping exercise with affected communities to identify the impacts of COVID-19 in 85 villages, 'Aisyiyah provided food self-sufficiency movement which was rolled out by introducing food gardening (*lumbung hidup*), fish farming, and water spinach growing. Muslimat/Fatayat remained consistent with their vision and missions, as they continue their work on monitoring pregnant women and campaigning on pregnancy spacing (Komnas Perempuan, 2020d).

Humanitarian aid provided by Wanita Hindu Dharma Indonesia (WHDI), Wanita Buddha Indonesia (WBI), and Christianity-based organizations such as Wanita Katolik Republik Indonesia (WKRI) (all women's organizations) was a combination of staple commodities, face masks, and PPEs donations as well as assistance to set up hand-washing facilities in places of worship for the purpose of educating people and implementing health protocols. The Buddhist community through the advisory council of Wandani (Buddhist women organization) also actively disseminated information to their congregation regarding 'practicing religious rituals from home', maintaining distance in places of worship, and attending weekly religious services via online platforms (Komnas Perempuan, 2020d).

The online survey and FGDs as well as in-depth interviews with 218 Aisyiyah board members from different levels (village, subdistrict, district, province, and national leadership) indicate that **women are not passive but active actors who are capable to take on endeavours to care** for their surroundings. The survey indicates that 87% of female respondents have donated staple commodities, 98% respondents delivered educational activities on COVID-19 prevention, 49% respondents helped micro and small businesses to adopt online marketing, and 22% carried out policy advocacy and developed local food barns (Komnas Perempuan, 2020d). Together with faith-based communities, women can become an agent of change that can mitigate the impacts of the pandemic inclusively beyond their own community.

CONCLUSIONS

Women's resilience is demonstrated in the four case studies as the ability to mitigate the impacts, to adapt, and to network when confronted with crisis cause by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The order for people to 'stay at home' and 'work from home' brought consequences that have gender dimensions, increased risks of violence against women and needs for child protection measures. Komnas Perempuan quickly undertook gender analysis to respond to the impacts of the pandemic. The four case studies presented in this Policy Brief are summarized in six conclusions:

1. Without having to wait for social protection and economic stimulus packages, service providers for women victims of violence persistently identified cases and continued to provide protection to survivors of violence, adapted their work and became more innovative ('safe houses'), and networked more closely with new partners (paralegals, security forces, village government, church-based centres, and interfaith communities) to protect women and children;
2. Women's leadership strongly emerged, where women were able to coordinate openly using practical digital means (WhatsApp groups) and gained recognition, trust, and support from family, community, and society;

3. The use of community organization model was suitable to mobilize solidarity economy and to manage women's volunteerism, as well as to equally distribute workload among volunteers and to enable transparent logistics management and accountable funds management, without putting behind the mission to monitor cases of violence against women;
4. Women can 'multi-task' – to take the lead and to participate; to act as intermediary to connect the producers (agriculture and animal farmers) and the food-assistance beneficiaries (the elderly, commercial sex workers, and other urban poor); to create spaces for different elements of the society (religious study forums, commercial sex workers, local natives, internal immigrants ("the Other")) to meet each other – generating collective power to overcome challenges of funding and social segregation;
5. Public kitchen operations are the symbol of women's political empowerment as kitchens became the true political sphere for women who had been domesticated and did not get any recognition. The emergence of public kitchens in many cities signals a positive impact of the rise of community-based solidarity movement that has succeeded to break the barriers and prejudices inherited from previous conflicts. Solidarity economy reinforces peace and values of humanity.
6. Women's human rights sensitivity was demonstrated by faith-based women's organizations that were able to deal with the impacts of the pandemic inclusively while remaining consistent with their vision and missions.

These conclusions not only prove women's resilience but also serve as evidence that women citizens are capable to perform their roles and responsibilities, individually and collectively.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Strengthen the effectiveness of service providers for women victims of violence and women's leadership in organizational structures** by providing women's empowerment trainings on 'leadership', negotiation, collaboration, commitment, which contribute to the promotion of gender equality/equity and prevention of social stigma so that women are not easily 'labelled', 'stereotyped', and discriminated against – with support from central and local governments' budget.
- **Build capacity** through ongoing training for paralegals at district/municipality and subdistrict/village level, training on development of referral schemes, mapping of shelters/safe houses, psychosocial recovery, and monitoring and reporting of 'violence' against women to local service providers.
- **Increase the competence of women's organizations by engaging with government officials** from villages in the rural area or neighbourhood/community units in the urban area, up to the national level, in line with development principles as defined in the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) 2020-2024: *building independence, ensuring justice, and maintaining sustainability*.
- **Provide skills training to build accountability schemes, equal management of volunteers, transparent management of logistics, accountable financial management**, and monitoring of violence against women in '*real time*'. Support in terms of funding and resources for the trainings should be accommodated by the government without any discrimination against community-based (private) service providers.

- **Increase social media coverage on violence against women, children, and the elderly, at the family, community, cyber or online level, in public and state sphere. The material can be used as content in the ongoing paralegal training** and education for the general public, traditional and religious leaders, and the relevant Ministries including Ministry of Manpower, Ministry of Law and Human Rights, in addition to the National Planning Ministry (Bappenas), Ministry of Health, Coordinating Ministry of Human Development and Cultural Affairs, as well as Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection.
- **Expand digital literacy training for women**, how to use IT-based new media (twitter, Instagram, etc.) to help marketing women's economic ventures or sharing evidence of acts of violence such as negative impacts of child marriages, with the support of Ministry of Communication and Informatics, as well as access to Base-Transceiver-Stations (BTS) in areas with many blank spots, lack of communication reception, and no/low smartphone ownership.
- **Provide real support from the relevant* Ministries to increase social media coverage on acts of violence** against women, children, and the elderly, at the family, community, cyber or online level, and in public and state spheres, as well as to use the existing material/evidence in delivering/supporting trainings.

Notes: the relevant* Ministries are: the National Planning Ministry (Bappenas), Ministry of Manpower, Ministry of Law and Human Rights, Ministry of Health, Coordinating Ministry of Human Development and Cultural Affairs, as well as Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, Ministry of Village Development, and others that are not specified here.

The list of service providers for victims of violence in Indonesia can be accessed here: <https://komnasperempuan.go.id/mitra-komnas-perempuan/pengadalaan>

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