

# Women at the Forefront

Inspirational stories and  
experiences from the Women  
and Girls at the Center of  
COVID-19 Prevention Programme  
in Indonesia



From  
the People of Japan







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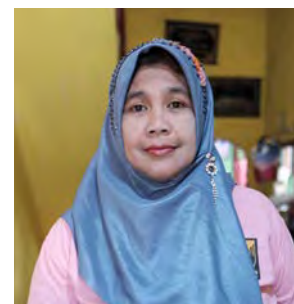
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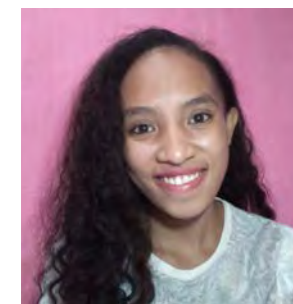
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# Introduction





# Introduction

## The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Women and Girls in Indonesia

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 in late December 2019, a global pandemic has been declared. Countries all over the globe have tried to respond to the health crisis in a swift and effective manner, while managing its socio-economic impact. The pandemic has proven to be a challenge for much of the world, including in Indonesia.

Indonesia confirmed its first COVID-19 cases in early March, a move that was followed by a string of

social restrictions policies. Its death toll by June 2021 reached around 54,000, higher than other Southeast Asian countries and was among the highest in the world.<sup>1</sup> The effects of the pandemic, including the related public health responses, have been significant.

More than a health crisis, COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted women and girls in Indonesia. It exacerbated the already existing

gender inequality and exposing women's vulnerabilities to economic shocks, especially for women of marginalized group, including women in informal employment and daily wage workers. Women are losing their livelihoods, because they are overrepresented in sectors and jobs hardest hit by the pandemic. A survey conducted by UN Women on the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and men indicated that 82 per cent of women have seen substantial drops

in their income source from family business. In addition, 36 per cent women in informal employment have seen decreased paid work time.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, social distancing measures have made unpaid domestic work an essential service, and women are

<sup>1</sup> WHO and Johns Hopkins CSSE. (2021). <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>

<sup>2</sup> UN Women and Indosat Ooredoo (2021). <https://data.unwomen.org/publications/counting-costs-covid-19-assessing-impact-gender-and-achievement-sdgs-indonesia>







bearing the heaviest burden. The same survey indicated that 69 per cent of women spend more time on unpaid domestic work. Similarly, 61 per cent women saw increases in their time spent doing unpaid care work.

Intense domestic interaction during social restriction periods, and other possible factors such as financial pressures have also contributed to

a spike in gender-based violence. Lockdowns and quarantine measures mean that many women are confined with their abusers, with limited options for seeking help and support. In a national online survey conducted in April through May 2020, the National Commission on Violence against Women (Komnas Perempuan) found that during large-scale social restrictions 80 per cent of female respondents from lower

income groups experienced an increase in psychological and sexual violence due to financial pressure. In the same period, the report states that large-scale social restrictions also led to a decrease in domestic violence services, and closures of shelters and safe houses for survivors.

Nevertheless, women are on the frontlines of the COVID-19 response as health-care workers, community

leaders and mobilizers, and many others. Women play an important role in their communities, where they share information about the virus and how it spreads, as well as take up COVID-19 prevention roles.





## About “Women and Girls at the Center of COVID-19 Prevention” Project

With the generous support of the Government of Japan, UN Women implemented the project “Women and Girls at the Centre of COVID-19 Prevention” as part of a broader regional project aimed at reducing the disproportionate gender-based risks and negative impact of COVID-19 on women. Beneficiaries included women who were most marginalized and in particularly vulnerable situations. In realizing this goal, UN Women focused on achieving the following objectives:

1. For women to have access to life-saving information, resources, services and skills that will reduce the spread and negative socio-economic impact of COVID-19 in communities at risk;
2. For women’s groups and networks to be able to influence and contribute to gender-responsive policies on COVID-19 and its prevention, and continue to provide protection and prevention services;
3. For the national and regional platforms to be strengthened to inform inclusive and gender-responsive measures that prevent the spread and negative socio-economic impact of COVID-19.





In this project, UN Women Indonesia worked in three main areas:

1. Economic Recovery: Supporting women's livelihoods through prototyping gender responsive cash-based interventions and then supporting the capacity building activities to empower women during COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.
2. Reducing Gender-Based Violence: Establishing bystander networks and building back better support mechanisms for victims of violence.
3. Women's Leadership:
  - Strengthening capacity for women advocates to act as frontline community health ambassadors.
  - Advocating for greater representation in decision-making process locally and nationally.
4. Supporting Civil Society Organizations to have the capacity to assist and provide services to the communities during these testing times.

The project aimed at meeting the immediate and urgent needs of women and girls while also laying the foundation for building back better and equal. A total of 610 women benefited from the cash-based interventions, 100 women received advocacy and leadership training, and more than 100 individuals received knowledge on coordinated quality services to better support and empowers women migrant workers. In addition, 11 women's crisis centres and shelters across the country were supported to ensure that services for women's survivors of violence could continue during the pandemic.

The project also capitalized on UN Women's works in promoting women's empowerment and leadership in cohesive communities and built on UN Women's strong relationships with civil society organizations, women's groups, and grassroots organizations.

In Indonesia, UN Women rolled out the project in June 2020 through May 2021. During the project, UN Women Indonesia collaborated with various partners, including national government counterparts (Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection) and civil society organizations (Federation of Indonesia Textile, Clothing and Leather Workers Unions, LBH Apik, SAPA Institute, Yayasan Care Peduli, Yayasan Plan International Indonesia)



# Enabling Gender Sensitive Entrepreneurship





## Enabling Gender Sensitive Entrepreneurship

The COVID-19 crisis has hit the garment sector in Asia and the Pacific, including in Indonesia, particularly hard, affecting millions of workers and enterprises in the supply chains. Women make up the majority of the region's garment workers and have been disproportionately affected by the

crisis.<sup>3</sup> Adding to this, they have also had to face increasing health risks and gendered impacts, such as unpaid care work.

In response to the situation, UN Women collaborated with Yayasan Care Peduli (YCP) in leading a pilot initiative, prototyping and test-

ing the design and implementation of gender-responsive Cash-for-Work programme. The programme targeted women who had lost their jobs and incomes and were entitled to receive government social protection funds.

The initiative supported women garment workers located in Sukabumi

and Purwakarta, West Java, where many garment factories are located. A total of 60 mask producers and 209 mask marketers received cash for work and cash transfers to help create and obtain a source of income.

<sup>3</sup>. ILO (2020). [https://www.ilo.org/asia/publications/issue-briefs/WCMS\\_758626/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/asia/publications/issue-briefs/WCMS_758626/lang--en/index.htm)





They were also given training in which they could learn to repurpose their existing skills for mask production with a focus on value chain and entrepreneurship development. This initiative also incorporated capacity building activities aimed to empower the women's leadership and negotiation skills, along with gender-sensitive training to increase men's involvement in promoting gender equality in their household and community.

Through this programme, UN Women also supported the government to mobilize resources and pilot for cash and in-kind support for women in informal and vulnerable employment, particularly those who work for daily wages such as street vendors and small merchants, as well as single mothers and female-headed households. The beneficiaries received access to online training, coaching, and mentoring through the free online

self-learning platform [WeLearn](#), to help them initiate, manage and grow their businesses.

The project has longer term objective to provide scalable intervention model to address structural gender inequality in social protection programme. Hence, it went beyond providing Cash-for-Work assistance and emergency social protection, to integrating gender dynamics within the household, promoting the empowerment of

women at the local community level, and engaging civil society and women organizations to increase resilience.





## Siti Rohmah

“Not only did the Cash-for-Work programme help lift the burden off my family, it has also restored my confidence as a woman entrepreneur.”





Siti Rohmah, a mother of three, was among the women workers at the many garment factories in Sukabumi, West Java. After clocking 10 years as a factory worker, she decided to quit and become a full-time housewife. Her husband Dinul worked as a security guard while running a school canteen during the day. To supplement her family

income, she opened a small kiosk at their house. Their income was stable, until the COVID-19 pandemic hit in March 2020.

With school being closed, so was Dinul's canteen. Her kiosk did not fare better either. In normal times, the kiosk could barely compete with convenience stores that were

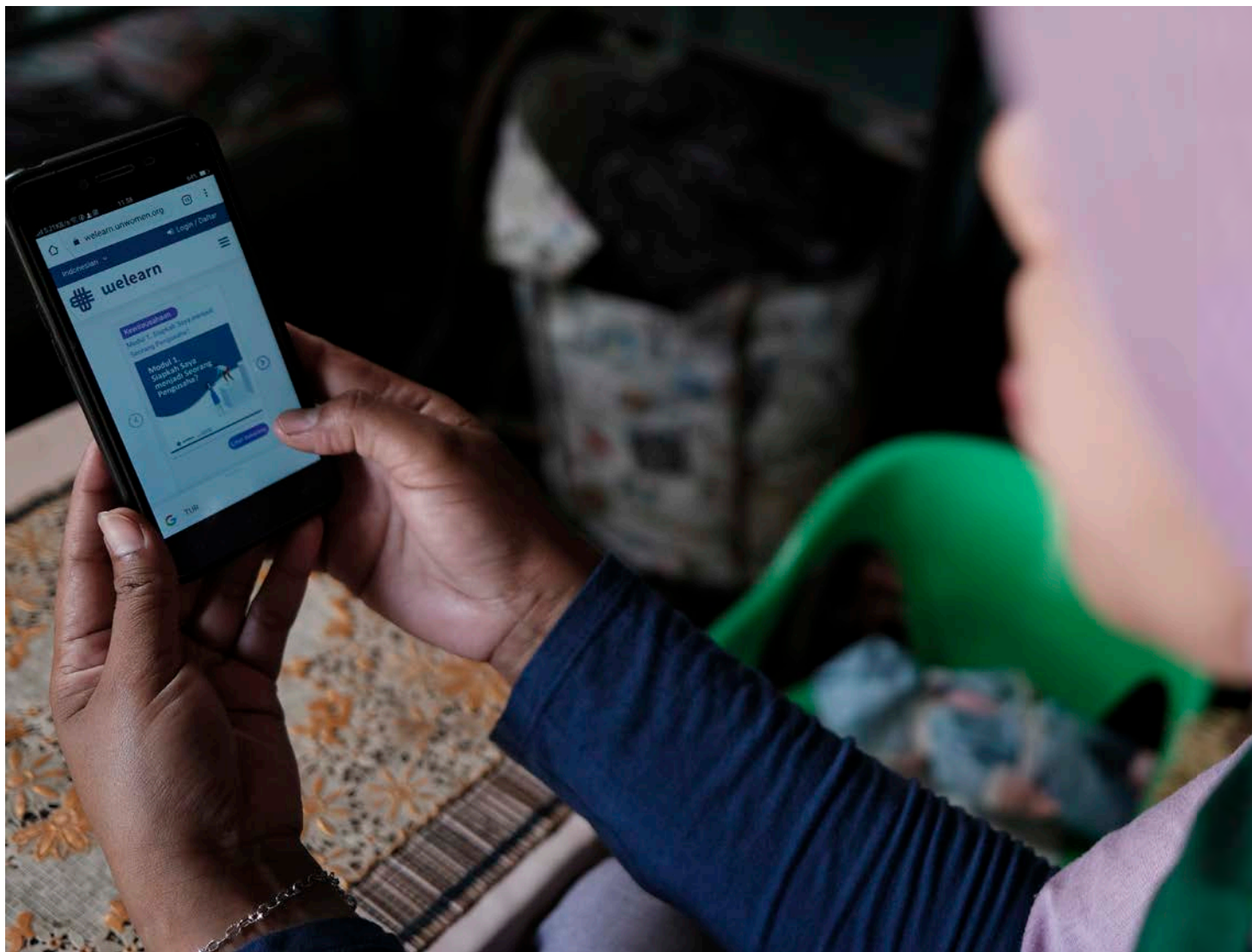
popping up all over her neighbourhood. As the pandemic began to affect the economy and people's purchasing power, the family's income took a big hit. Life became tougher for Siti and her family.

Instead of losing hopes, Siti and her husband rallied, drawing strength and motivation from their children to keep

their spirit up. She believed that behind every difficulty she was facing, there was another opportunity.

"The COVID-19 pandemic affected millions of people worldwide," she said, "So there must be a way out of it, since we're all in this together."





For months it was day-to-day survival for the family, until a programme called Cash-for-Work was introduced to their village. The programme encouraged women to use their sewing skill to produce masks. Siti and other women in the programme also received training on starting a business and digital marketing, which sparked her entrepreneurial spirit. For better outreach, the women were split into small groups based on their locations to receive capacity building training. This system enabled the women to become more productive and to

offer support to each other during difficult times.

Siti is a leader for one of these groups, managing four women. She organized the women in her village to produce masks in large numbers, turning her home into their workshop. Her role was to oversee the whole production and maintain quality control.

“Not only did the Cash-for-Work programme help lift the burden off my family, it has also restored my confidence as a woman entrepreneur.



Through this programme I can lead a small team and put the experience I got from working at a garment factory to use,” Siti said. “The women in my team are also former garment factory workers, so this has helped us apply our skills and enabled us to distribute the work equally.”

The Cash-for-Work programme has not only helped Siti and other women in her village survive the pandemic, it has also given them hopes and inspiration to keep going while seizing new opportunities. In addition, Siti saw opportunities to expand her business through the people

she met and the network she has built through the programme. Now she has a new goal in mind: to scale up her mask production business into a full-blown garment business.





## Yanti

“You have to say to yourself that you can. Believe you can, and you will be able to do it.”





Yanti had never imagined how much her life would be changed by the pandemic. She had been running a small garment business that she had hoped to grow to help provide job opportunities to other women in her village, most of whom used to be factory workers. She wanted to give them options and empower them so they could improve their welfare. Then the COVID-19 pandemic happened, hitting her business hard with her revenue drastically taking a plunge. She had no choice but to let go of most of her employees. But this was not something that Yanti was willing to accept; she was determined to get back up again.

Opportunities came when she was chosen to take part in the Cash-for-Work programme provided by UN Women in collaboration with the Federation of Indonesian Textile, Clothing and Leather Workers Unions (Federasi Serikat Pekerja Tekstil, Sandang dan Kulit Serikat Pekerja Seluruh Indonesia or FSP TSK-SPSI) in Purwakarta. Yanti took part in this programme as a marketer whose job was to market and sell masks produced by women in the Cash-for-Work programme. She also received training and coaching to help her start a business and strengthen her entrepreneurial skills to survive the

economic downturn brought on by the pandemic.

For Yanti, the programme ended up being a valuable and memorable experience. After the training and coaching program, she noticed a change in her mindset. Her self-confidence increased and she became more motivated to grow her business. It gave her a much-needed boost to start selling and marketing the masks. Thanks to this newfound confidence, Yanti was able to sell all the masks within a day simply by posting them on social media and sending WhatsApp broadcast messages to all her contacts.

She admitted that prior to joining the programme, she was often in doubt about whether she could keep her business going, considering the challenges that seemed too great to overcome at times. The training allowed her to learn from those who have overcome similar challenges, and other women who succeeded in the same field. She felt that if they could do it, so could she. She has learned the skills necessary to adapt to the world that had been changed by the pandemic.

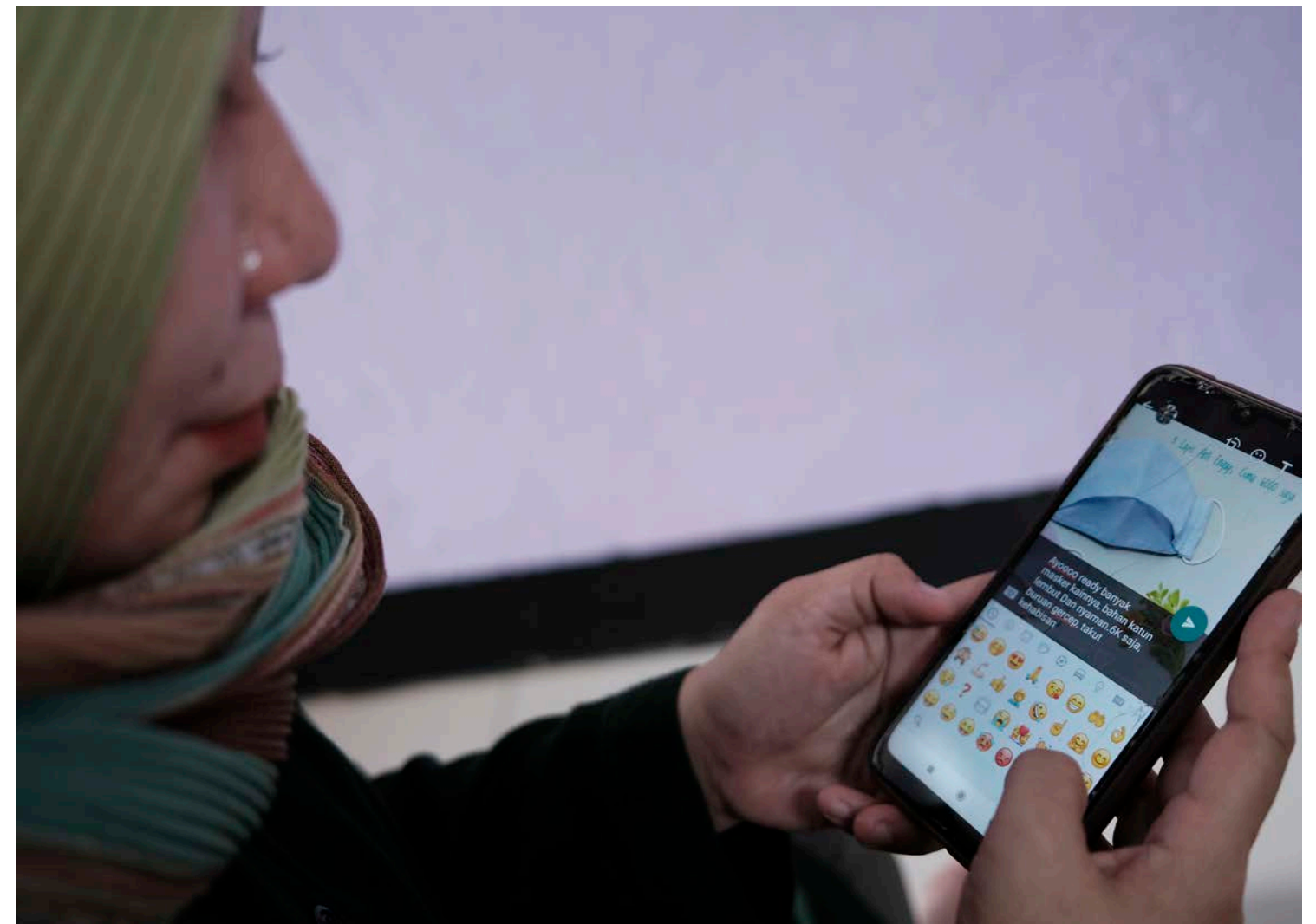




The training also equipped Yanti with practical knowledge and skills to apply to her business. She learned to improve the management of her business to streamline it better. She also learned how to improve her garment production, and build her brand, so clients would choose her over her competitors. The most important thing was getting tips on how to cut her expenses by getting suppliers to send her fabrics via expedition services, instead of picking up fabrics by herself to Bandung. This tip has helped cut down her expenses by 80 percent,

and it was one of the reasons her business started to bounce back again.

Her training ended up being the much-needed spark to get going again. Not only did she receive incentives for selling the masks, she also gained the confidence to promote her business and expand her network. But most important is that she was reminded why she had started the business in the first place: to empower the women around her to be more independent and productive.



She had a message to motivate women like her, those who had lost their jobs working in factories, women who thought they could no longer contribute:

“You have to say to yourself that you can. Believe you can, and you will be able to do it. Don’t be shy and don’t be afraid to market your product, market yourself. Where there’s a will, there’s a way. Keep on believing in yourself and believe that God will help you as long as you keep the faith.”

Yanti and her garment business show that when we empower women, we

empower the communities around her. There is nothing a woman cannot do when she starts believing in herself.



# Providing Support to Survivors of Gender-Based Violence and Women Migrant Workers





## Providing Support to Survivors of Gender-Based Violence and Women Migrant Workers

With the COVID-19 pandemic bringing a combination of economic and social stress due to restrictions on movements, the risk of women and girls experiencing gender-based violence (GBV) has increased exponentially. This is further compounded by the loss of income and the psychological toll of the pandemic, making it especially difficult for women trapped at home with their abusers, especially when coupled with reduced or limited access to public services.

At the beginning of the pandemic, a report from the Jakarta Legal Aid Foundation of the Indonesian Women Association for Justice (LBH APIK) has shown that the number of gender-based violence has spiked. From March to September 2020, Indonesia had a total of 1,178 cases of GBV, an almost 50 per cent increase from 794 cases in 2019. In Jakarta, LBH APIK received a surge in daily reports of violence against women and girls at 97 cases, three times the daily average.<sup>4</sup>

With healthcare systems at peril, shelters for domestic violence were reaching capacity. The pandemic has

caused service providers to limit their activities in many remote locations as priorities shifted to the spread of COVID-19 prevention and response. Furthermore, the service providers for victims of GBV were also struggling with safety concerns and shortage of funding. A Rapid Assessment of 100 CSOs from Indonesia, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Viet Nam shows that although most of them were still operational, many had limited their scope to only providing referrals, emergency aid, psychosocial and legal services.<sup>5</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic has also increased the risk of violence against women migrant workers by employers, partners, law enforcement officials or front-line service providers. Since Indonesia women migrant workers predominantly work as domestic workers, they might be vulnerable to workplace violence during the quarantine. They are also prone to facing violence and harassment on their journeys back home or at COVID-19 quarantine facilities, and intimate partner violence upon returning

as families cope with additional stress and economic losses. Service providers needed to adjust to the situation and condition to provide services for women migrant workers who became victims of gender-based violence and human trafficking during the health crisis. Amid the restriction and limitation, they had to anticipate and be prepared for the potential of violence cases increasing.

UN Women worked closely with women's organizations to meet the increased health and essential service needs of gender-based violence survivors and protect women's and girls' rights during the pandemic.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2021/01/12/pandemic-sees-rising-violence-against-indonesian-women-but-few-report-to-police.html>

<sup>5</sup> UN Women (2020). *Rapid Assessment: Impact of COVID-19 on Women's Civil Society Organisations*.





## Providing Safe Shelter for Gender-Based Violence Survivors

UN Women worked with LBH APIK to ensure that essential services – including crisis centres and shelters for women – and referral mechanisms remained available and accessible despite increased demand. Specialized in providing legal aid for marginalized women and children experiencing violence, LBH APIK played a key role in coordinating 10 other women’s crisis centres and shelters across the country, providing food, accommodation, legal support, counselling, and mediation. UN Women’s support ensured that these services could continue during

the pandemic. Between March 2020 and May 2021, LBH APIK has handled about 1,300 cases with the support from UN Women Indonesia.

Together with UN Women, LBH APIK and its networks have also collectively integrated standard operating procedures (SOPs) to enact during the pandemic. These SOPs include best practices on health protocols in the module on shelters for women.

## Gender-Responsive Approach to Protection of Vulnerable Women

UN Women, with the support from the Government of Japan and European Union as part of “Safe and Fair: Realizing women migrant workers’ rights and opportunities in the ASEAN region”, worked closely with the Ministry of Women’s Empowerment and Child Protection (MoWECP) and partnered with civil society organizations to build the capacity of frontline support workers to strengthen and adapt essential services for vulnerable women and children experiencing violence during the pandemic. It also developed guidelines and protocols

for protecting the rights of women and girls and marginalized groups in the pandemic response. The guidelines and protocols emphasize the importance of a victim-centered approach, empowering the victims and putting them as the main subject of the services. It will also serve as a reference for the government, service providers, community-based organizations, or consular services to ensure more coordinated quality services that better support marginalized groups, particularly women migrant workers during the pandemic.







## Ana\*

“I now feel safe enough to go out and look for work, since I know my children are well taken care of in the safe house.”





To say the pandemic has not been kind to Ana would be an understatement. She would never imagine that while the whole world was battling a crippling pandemic, she would have to uproot her life, take her children, and seek refuge in a safe house.

Prior to the pandemic, Ana did not see the urgency to leave her troubling domestic situation. Despite having been in an abusive marriage for years, she had stayed because her husband was mostly away, working in a different town. She had assumed that things would not get worse. But the pandemic made her husband

quit his out-of-town job to move back home. Suddenly, she found herself trapped with her abuser, cut off from her friends and family. It was then that she discovered her husband was abusing their children, and that was when Ana decided she had had enough. She needed to protect herself and her children, so she filed for divorce.

Things only escalated after she filed for divorce. It was not enough to stop her husband from assaulting her, so Ana looked for help. She went to the Centre for Integrated Services for Empowering Women and Children (P2TP2A), where she

was referred to Legal Aid for Women and Children (LBH APIK). During this time, Ana needed to seek refuge where her husband could not find her, but she had nowhere to go at first, until an acquaintance offered their home to her and her children. For three months she stayed there, before LBH APIK finally moved them to a safe house.

Moving to a safe house provided a considerable relief to Ana, knowing that her ex-husband could not find her and her children. LBH APIK made sure that her address and contact details were kept strictly confidential. Even her correspondence with the authorities and her own family had to go through

the organization for safety measures. LBH APIK's assistance restored her sense of safety and security, Ana said.



To help them process their trauma, both Ana and her children were also provided with psychological counselling. Ana said these counselling sessions helped rebuild her strength and resilience, while sharing sessions with fellow survivors gave her the support and encouragement to keep going. Even her children seemed to have gotten better.

“I didn’t realize this at first, but my youngest who used to be ill a lot is now in better spirits and health,” she said. “This has encouraged me to go out and look for work, since I know my children are well taken care of in the safe house.”

Although the job hunt has yet to yield a result, Ana was hopeful. She knew it would be tough for her to get a

job, since she has been a housewife for most of her adult life, but she had faith that she would be able to land on her feet. LBH APIK has offered her job training so she could start a new life, and she hoped to train as a professional makeup artist.

“I am truly grateful to the support. I hope that more women like me can get the help they need before it’s too late,” she added.







## Sister Ika

“It’s more than just getting violence victims out of their situation. They need to be empowered and educated so they have better choices, and they can be independent.”





TRUK-F or Volunteers for Humanity Flores has a long history of service for humanity. It was founded in 1997 by a group of nuns and priests in Maumere in East Nusa Tenggara, with a mission to advocate for women and children's rights. From 2000 to 2020, TRUK-F has provided legal aid, psychological counselling and support, as well as helped shelter violence victims in their safe house.

After the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the nuns who run TRUK-F remained active and busy as they were before, but things had changed. They used to rescue survivors directly at their location or homes, but the pandemic had restricted their movements. Now,

they could no longer accompany survivors to the District Attorney's office and had to do everything online. They could only rescue victims in truly dire situations while making sure they adhered to strict health protocols. And instead of going directly to community groups and schools to provide educational resources and advocacy as they did before, they now have to do most of the work through social media.

Extreme poverty in the region that was exacerbated by the pandemic did not help the already dire situation for women and girls. Over the past year, TRUK-F has helped rescue women and children sold

into prostitution and brought them into the safe house. In 2020, it assisted five young teenagers through unwanted pregnancies resulting from sexual violence. This year, two more pregnant girls have been brought to their care.

The support from UN Women in collaboration with LBH APIK helped Sister Ika and the others in TRUK-F to provide for women and girls in the Safe House. They were also pleased when asked to contribute to the creation of the Safe House's SOPs.

"While being involved in drafting the SOPs, I had a chance to share and listen to other activists. This has given me better insight and understanding

from listening to stories from my peers in other parts of Indonesia. It has also helped me in my work in Flores."



Sister Ika believes that healing is possible for survivors of gender-based violence, no matter how difficult and complicated the situation is. This is why she is deeply thankful for the opportunity given to TRUK-F to participate in the creation of the SOPs. She admitted TRUK-F still lacked counselling skills and suggested that they receive training to provide counselling for victims so they could provide better care in the future. Through further collaboration with UN Women and LBH APIK, TRUK-F can help the victims better by empowering them for their future, she added.

“It’s more than just getting violence victims out of their situation,” she said. “We also need to make sure that they don’t end up in the same situation again. They need to be empowered and educated so they have better choices and can be independent.”

Sister Ika and other nuns and staff at TRUK-F believe that God is using them to do the good work to bring about change and healing in Flores and beyond, so women and children will no longer be victims, but become agents of change.







## Sugih Hartini

“Now we are more confident in going out and providing our assistance directly to the women migrant workers. We know what to do now and the steps that we must follow.”





SAPA Institute is an independent institute that focuses on women's issues related to sexual and reproductive health rights, financial independence, and violence against women. Established in 2005, SAPA has been working to provide education and conduct advocacy in villages across West Java since 2007. One of these villages is Cipaku, where SAPA first formed its community called Bale Istri (Wives Association). Sugih, a long-time team member of SAPA, said that Bale Istri was established to address the high number of gender-based violence. It grew as a community and was received well, and eventually

the organization formed a similar community for teenagers, Bale Remaja, and for men, Bale Laki Laki. The aim was to encourage men to be allies to women. There are now 10 Bale Istri, seven Bale Remaja, and three Bale Laki Laki.

SAPA was one of the CSOs supporting UN Women and the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection to disseminate information on the Guidelines on the Protection of Women Migrant Workers during COVID-19 and the Protocol for Handling Gender-Based Violence and Trafficking During COVID-19. In the beginning, they had

to overcome a few challenges, mainly technical.

"It was just a bit hard because these ex-migrant workers didn't really understand gadgets or using the internet. We have tried to hold onsite meetings, but it was difficult since we often didn't know what to do," Sugih stated.

This was when the guidelines and protocol came in handy for SAPA. Aside from disseminating information on the guidelines and protocol, SAPA also used the guidelines to update their SOPs. Hence, volunteers like Sugih were more confident and felt safe when they were out to provide services on

education and advocacy that they had been doing before the pandemic. Their work during the health crisis is essential. The pandemic has intensified financial and social stresses across the villages, and poverty and debts made many women more vulnerable to being taken advantage of and being recruited as migrant workers.





"The recruiters usually would come in after the women were desperate having not been able to pay their loans," Sugih said. "They would tell [these women] all kinds of things that are too good to be true, like they're going to get a high salary and they can live comfortably overseas. And some even had their relatives persuading them to join them overseas, promising that they would be safe. It was hard, we have tried to stop them, but sometimes we were too late."

Before the pandemic, SAPA routinely held meetings for their communities – twice a week for Bale Istri. The

social restrictions during the pandemic made them unable to conduct any training or continue their programs. If they were able to conduct a meeting, it was attended by 15 to 20 at the most and they needed a big enough space to ensure proper physical distance. Thanks to the updated SOPs, however, now SAPA had a guidance they could adhere to when providing their services and carrying on with their regularly scheduled meetings.

The updated SOPs have also helped SAPA volunteers provide assistance especially to women

migrant workers with difficult cases. When a problem arises, the volunteers assisting the women migrant workers would know what to do. Furthermore, the SOPs have incorporated COVID-19 prevention measures to minimize the risk of infections when providing assistance.

"Our community is spread out in a number of areas, so we had to ensure that all areas can follow the flow of this updated SOPs," Sugih said, "Alhamdulillah, thanks to the SOPs, now we are more confident in going out and providing our assistance directly to the women migrant workers."

We know what to do now, and the steps that we must follow."

For Sugih and the rest of her team in SAPA Institute, the journey ahead of them remains long as they continue to work to protect women migrant workers' rights. But she believes that as they continue to sow the seeds of good work in the lives of the communities, change is going to happen, and the fruit of their hard work will not come for nothing.





## **Drs. Rafail Walangitan, MA**

“The guidelines and protocol were designed to ensure that women migrant workers knew their rights to be free from violence and that there are systems in place to protect them.”





In early 2020, when the government declared the COVID-19 pandemic a national emergency, Rafail Walangitan and his colleagues at the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection knew that it was imperative for them to develop a system that could help protect marginalized women, particularly women migrant workers. By September 2020, about 25,000 Indonesian migrant workers were returning from countries affected by COVID-19, 71 per cent of them are women.

Even in normal circumstances, women migrant workers are already

at risk of discrimination, exploitation, and violence. The pandemic has increased the risk of violence against women migrant workers during their employment in confined domestic settings, during their journey home, and even at home due to economic stressors. Data collected during the first months of the pandemic showed that many women migrant workers did not receive proper health care or check-ups. Some even contracted the virus and did not receive adequate treatment and care. Moreover, many were also sexually harassed or assaulted while they were at transit shelters.

These concerns led the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection to come up with an initiative to design guidelines and protocol in collaboration with the UN Women.

"UN Women was there every step of the way," Rafail said. "From the early discussions to hiring a consultant, drafting, and finalizing the guideline and protocol, and even during the socialization process with other Ministries and Institutions, civil society organizations, and other communities that works for the protection of women migrant workers' rights."

For Rafail, the Guidelines on the Protection of Women Migrant Workers during COVID-19 and the Protocol for Handling Gender-Based Violence and Trafficking During COVID-19 are crucial to help women migrant workers, especially those who have been sent back home due to the pandemic. These guidelines inform them how to prepare for their return to Indonesia, who to contacts, what they must pay attention to, and what to do if something happens to them – if they experience sexual harassment or contract COVID-19 on their travels.





The guidelines and protocol were written to ensure their safety, eliminate confusion and assure women migrant workers that the government protects them. Rafail said the guidelines provide every information they need for any situation that may arise through the migration cycle so they will be able to feel safe and secure.

“The guidelines and protocol were designed to ensure that the women migrant workers knew their rights to be free from violence of any kind, and that there are systems in place to protect them from being abused, violated or exploited,” he added.

The Protocol helps service providers — whether from the government or non-government organizations such as CSOs, placement companies, and trade unions — improve their services so that women migrant workers can be more protected in all cycles of migration during the pandemic. In handling abuse cases, the approach taken is victim-centered, prioritizing on the victims’ safety and well-being in all matters and procedures. Migrant workers who are violence survivors are treated with dignity and respect, given access to a safe, supportive, non-judgmental environment, given access to appropriate information, and able to make informed choices. Their rights

to privacy and confidentiality are also protected.

The guidelines and protocol have been disseminated to 74 service providers from the government, CSOs, and non-government organizations.

“We want to make sure that they truly understand the victim-centred approach, so the women will feel safe in coming forward and are no longer afraid to seek help for their situation,” added Rafail.

UN Women’s assistance in supporting the dissemination of the Guidelines on the Protection of Women Migrant Workers during COVID-19 and the

Protocol for Handling Gender-Based Violence and Trafficking During COVID-19 has been instrumental in this project. Rafail hopes the Guidelines will benefit relevant stakeholders to comprehensively support Indonesian women migrant workers during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.



# Fostering Women's Leadership in the Pandemic







## Fostering Women's Leadership in The Pandemic

The negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated gender inequalities globally and derail hard-won progress on gender equality. Nevertheless, during this challenging time, women have shown they are more than capable in handling the pandemic efficiently, transparently, and in a gender-sensitive manner. We have seen their contribution in this time of crisis as heads of state and government, legislators, healthcare workers, first responders, community leaders, and many more.

The success of women leaders in several countries in excelling COVID-19 response have provided

powerful examples of how women's leadership and participation can provide more effective, inclusive, and fair policies to address the pandemic. It is therefore important to include women in every response and recovery decision

To help grassroots women's movements and organizations recover without losing the hard-won gains made over the past decades to advance gender equality and the role of women in sustaining peace and security, UN Women fostered and encouraged women's participation and leadership in COVID-19 response.

## Preventing the Spread of COVID-19 in Vulnerable Communities

Beyond exacerbating existing socio-economic disparities, the COVID-19 crisis potentially fueled local conflict with the spread of misinformation, discrimination, and stigmatization against marginalized groups. Therefore, there was a critical need to continue to support grassroots women's movements and organizations to continue advancing gender equality and the role of women in sustaining peace and security.

UN Women has been supporting women's participation and leadership in promoting social cohesion and a peaceful society through Peace Village Initiative. The Peace Village initiative is a community-based initiative in Java driven by women's leadership and participation, with a particular focus on their potential role as peace agents. UN Women Indonesia in partnership with the Wahid Foundation conceived the Peace Village concept in 2017. To become a Peace Village, the village leaders need to agree to a set of commitments designed to prevent violence, promote tolerance, and advance social cohesion.

Leveraging this collaboration in centring women as peace and social cohesion agents, UN Women and Wahid Foundation piloted a Women's Participation in Decision Making and Leadership in Villages (WISE) Jaga project during the pandemic. This short project expanded and supported women's participation in the decision-making process in and around COVID-19 and beyond in their respective Peace Villages, while establishing a

coordination mechanism with the village government.

The initiative supported 100 women from 10 peace villages by providing advocacy, leadership, and development of decision-making skills and embedding them in the decision-making apparatus of the villages by organizing lobbying and advocacy learning sessions. The initiative allowed women community leaders and members to be more empowered and come up with solutions that better respond to their priorities and encourage them to participate fully in responses to the pandemic and beyond.

Along with this initiative, UN Women together with Yayasan Care Peduli with their Cash-for-Work program, selected 20 women community leaders to be community health ambassadors in their respective villages. The program aimed to ensure that women have access to life-saving information, resources, services, and skills to reduce the spread and the negative socio-economic impact of COVID-19 in communities at risk.





## Leading COVID-19 Prevention Efforts

To better support Indonesia's COVID-19 response so that it addressed the needs of women and girls, and to promote quick recovery, UN Women collaborated with Yayasan Plan International Indonesia to create SETARA (Service Provision to Strengthen existing platforms between women's groups and networks and local, subnational, or national government to inform gender-responsive development of

government policies and strategies on COVID-19 prevention) Project. The SETARA Project has launched a social media campaign to provide COVID-19 prevention information, health protocol reminders, and literacy surrounding the importance of incorporating gender perspective in responding to a pandemic emergency.

Under this project, UN Women and Plan International Indonesia have also formulated standard operating procedures (SOPs) designed for civil society organizations to strengthen engagement with the government in response to the pandemic. The SOPs were formulated in consultation with youth groups, women's organizations, and frontline service providers. Furthermore, Plan International held Focus Group Discussions involving

various youth activism groups from different parts of the country. UN Women hopes both projects will continue to foster women's leadership in various communities and regions across Indonesia, putting them in decision-making positions.





## Liza Yuvita Sikku

“Women must be given a chance to show what they can do because they, too, are contributors and accelerators of the village’s sustainable development.”





Having hopped from job to job in factories and retail, Liza Yuvita Sikku (Vita) discovered that her strength lay in stringing together words to create prose. A few years back, two of her writings received awards from the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture, opening doors to many opportunities. It led to her current role as a library manager and website and social media administrator at the Peace Village of Nglinggi in Klaten, Central Java. There, she is also known as one of the community's women leaders.

When the COVID-19 pandemic reached their region, Vita and some

women in Nglinggi took up the role of health frontliners, serving as contact tracers and educators. They also conducted food security efforts by supporting the distribution of staple food in the area. Vita was one of the women leaders recruited for the Peace Village project to empower women to become part of the COVID-19 prevention and response task force.

During the pandemic, many villagers lost their income, resulting in food insecurity. One of the roles of the COVID-19 task force was to ensure that the community received updates and information on the virus and on

health and security measures. It was a role that Vita took seriously knowing that with proper information on health protocols, the villagers could still go out and make a living while protecting themselves from the virus.

Even before the pandemic, Nglinggi had taken some outstanding steps to empower women through its motto of collaborating and working together to help one another. Vita is aware that patriarchy still rules in most areas led by male leaders and that women's contribution to public life is still largely underestimated by many local governments. Even in areas surrounding her village, most leaders

still believe that women's only role is to assist men. Vita credits her village head for not subscribing to this belief, and for recognizing the important contributions that women make and putting them in leadership and decision-making positions.





“Women must be given a chance to show what they can do, because they, too, are contributors and accelerators of the village’s sustainable development,” she said.

As part of the program, Vita and about 100 other women in Nglinggi learned to hone their leadership skills through online training in December 2020, working together on an action plan for COVID-19 prevention and response. She has since applied those skills as a program facilitator. Vita was also given another responsibility to

disseminate updated information on COVID-19 to the villages, and spread awareness on health and safety measures for disease prevention. They implemented health protocols, ran the local waste management, and managed food supply logistics to ensure meals were delivered to those in need. They have truly been the backbone of the village.

Nglinggi has become a shining example for other villages and communities of what happens when women in the community

are empowered, and Vita has been a source of inspiration for other women in her village. Her intelligence, tenacity, and compassion made younger women in the community look up to her.

“I’m grateful for the opportunity to participate in the COVID-19 task force. I know that I need to keep on improving my skills to serve my community better,” she added.





## Sugeng Mulyadi

“Women are equally capable to lead as men, but they are often not given the opportunity to do so.”





Women are equally capable to lead as men, but they are often not given the opportunity to do so. This is what Sugeng Mulyadi, the village head of Nglinggi, Central Java, has always firmly believed in. He was aware that unless women were given the chance to contribute, the village would not grow. Since he took office as the village head in 2013, he made sure to provide every opportunity for women there to take leadership positions and be involved in every decision-making process.

“Sometimes they just need opportunities,” he said. “The problem is we often exclude them in decision-making positions. But when we hand them responsibility, they take it and

run with it. It’s amazing what women can do if you give them a chance.”

With a population of 2,422 people, Nglinggi is a multicultural community with a rich heritage. The village prides itself on being a safe and peaceful place where women are treated equally and empowered for leadership positions. Like the rest of the country, the village has also been greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many micro and small businesses run by women in the village took a hit, their revenues dropping significantly. Some have had to shut down operations.

The Wahid Foundation in partnership with UN Women alleviated some

of their problems by providing a Wi-Fi facility for the village, enabling women to sell decorative plants on online marketplaces. Aside from empowering the women to become more productive economically, the Japan-funded assistance helped establish a COVID-19 task force, tackling prevention response, and recovery.

“The funds opened more opportunities for women to participate in preventative actions while accelerating local productivity. This has positively contributed to inclusive growth,” Sugeng said.

He observed how the women truly shone when given the opportunity to show their creative problem-solving abilities and their managerial skills. The

program has also given the women more confidence and a new mindset, encouraging them to speak up, contribute and be involved. As a result, the village flourished even more.

He expressed hopes that the women continue to grow and step into various leadership roles. One day he believes he will be replaced as a village head by a woman, and he cannot wait for that day to come.

“These women are truly amazing. They are fast learners, diligent and conscientious. And whatever you entrust them with, they work on it excellently,” he said.





## Linda Herlinawati

“Yes, God will always protect us - I believe that. But I also believe we must do our part to make sure everyone is healthy and safe.”





Linda had always had a thriving and busy life before the pandemic. Besides from being a village head of Babakan Pari in West Java, she also teaches early childhood education and has served as a health cadre campaigning for family planning in her village. Linda cares for her community and she wants to live her life in service of others. Before the pandemic, she would go around the village and neighbouring communities sharing empowering messages to women.

When the spread of the COVID-19 turned into a global pandemic, she realized that life would not be the

same again. The pandemic disrupted her life and her day-to-day activities. Her husband's spare parts business slowed down significantly, with fewer customers coming to the garage. All over her village, everyone was also struggling financially. With no signs of the pandemic slowing down, Linda wondered at some point whether her family and her village could survive.

Eventually, the government's assistance and the Cash and Voucher Assistance program from UN Women in collaboration with Yayasan Care Peduli arrived in the village. As a village head, Linda helped organize and ensure that the assistance was

distributed equally in the form of daily essentials during the next three months. The cash assistance helped the villagers get back on their feet, and before long, they became hopeful and started to find ways to restore their economic situation.

Linda's commitment to educating the people in her village led her to become a Health Ambassador, receiving training from UN Women and YCP to socialize and disseminate information on the COVID-19 prevention and recovery. She took this training seriously and was eager to implement what she had learned. Although at times she would experience setbacks in her work, she

never gave up and stayed on the message.

"Yes, God will always protect us — I believe that," she said. "But I also believe we must do our part to make sure everyone is healthy and safe."





Linda's dedication to keeping her village safe from the pandemic earned her a reputation. Everyone in her village respects her so much that no one dares to break health protocols in her presence. During the Eid Al-Fitr holiday, she took the initiative to disinfect the village with the money from the village's petty cash. She gathered the local youth to help by explaining the importance of disinfecting and sterilizing public places. It was easy for them to follow her lead because she has always led by example, going out and participating along with them.

Another issue that she takes seriously is promoting hygiene among the villagers. She has also taught the villagers to become more environmentally conscious by separating organic and non-organic wastes. Her unwavering commitment to educating them has brought some positive changes. They took to her message and made maintaining hygiene a priority.

Linda is a firm believer in gender equality. She sees the importance of women being financially empowered, not just utterly reliant

on their husbands. She encouraged the women who took part in the Cash-for-Work program – making masks for sale – to also produce and sell *rengginang* (a traditional rice cracker). She was surprised to see the snack selling briskly with orders coming in from the surrounding region.

Linda sees the importance of motivating women and of supporting them by building their capacity.

“Women who work hard, who can manage their finances, and who

know what they want can inspire the communities around them to do better,” she said.





## Renya

“I just can't wait to get started to implement what I've learned from this program.”





Around the world, teenage girls and young women have proven themselves to be a force of change. One such example is Renya, who has been an activist for gender equality and children's rights since she was 16 years old. Now 20, she looks wise beyond her years. Her passion for the cause is driven by the fact that she had been a victim. At a young age, she found that she could not just sit by and let things happen when her friends and family had been affected by bullying and gender-based violence. After participating in the Girls Take Over event, she decided

to join the Youth Coalition for Girls in Kupang as an activist.

Youth Coalition for Girls (YCG) was initiated by Plan International Indonesia, which advocates for the fulfilment of children's rights and gender equality in Indonesia. It actively campaigns against child marriages and gender-based violence while socializing the message of empowerment and gender equality in school and through social media.

The pandemic has moved most of their activities online, posing a different set of challenges. At the same time, social restrictions have increased the number of gender-based violence. Social restrictions also forced most people to go online, which intensified online gender-based violence and affected even more women and girls. Renya and her friends realized they had to do something despite the limitations they were facing.

The girls took part in one of the SETARA Project's focus group discussions (FGD) organized by

Plan International Indonesia with the support from UN Women to discuss the plan to disseminate information on COVID-19 prevention. For Renya, it was an invaluable experience meeting with other communities and organizations, even if it was done online.

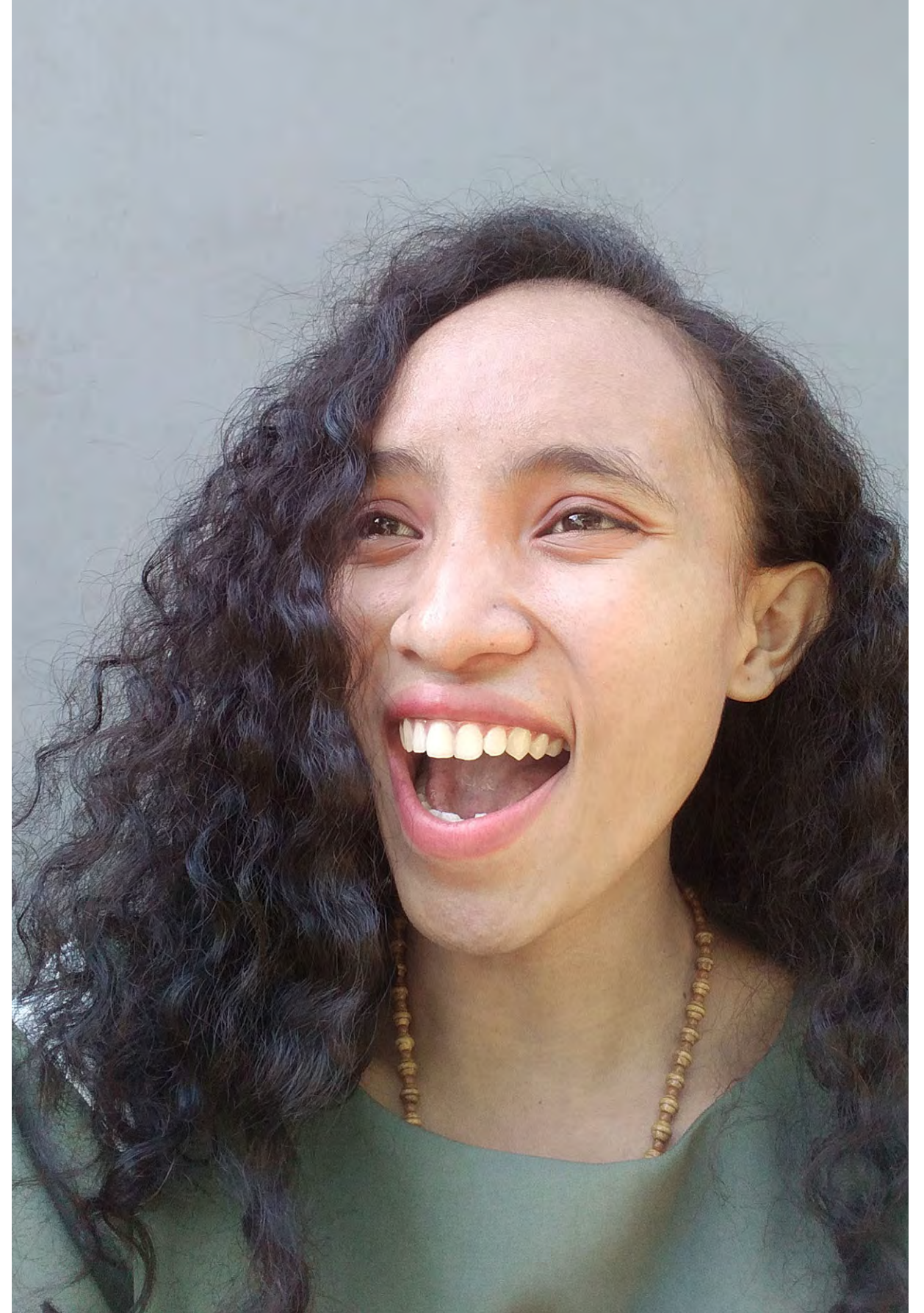
"I always thought that the problems we were facing here were specific to Kupang, but it turns out they are universal. Knowing that other communities are dealing with the same problems helped me see through a different perspective," she said.



SETARA project has also provided some new and rare insights for her. She admitted that participating in this initiative has opened her mind. She realized that there was a lot she did not know about when sharing information on COVID-19 and making those infected by the virus feel accepted and safe. The training has helped her become more sensitive to her surroundings – to not stigmatize those who suffer from COVID-19 – while offering moral and emotional support to them. She was also given practical steps on what to do when someone in her area is infected with the virus, information she would pass along to others. Now, Renya understood that proper knowledge is the only way to curb misinformation, which will also erase the stigma.

Renya said she felt lucky to have been a part of the SETARA Project. Through the discussions, she was able to meet people from other organizations and communities, expanding her network and giving her a chance to form new collaborations. She expressed hopes for collaborations with communities across Kupang to further spread information on COVID-19 prevention and treatment to the smallest unit of society.

“I just can’t wait to get started to implement what I’ve learned from this program,” she added.







# UN Women Indonesia's Support to Women and Girls During COVID-19 Pandemic



## UN Women Indonesia's Support to Women and Girls During COVID-19 Pandemic

With the support of the Government of Japan, UN Women in Indonesia worked closely with women's organisations to meet the increased health and essential service needs of gender-based violence survivors and to protect women and girls' rights during the pandemic.

### LBH APIK

The Legal Aid Agency of the Indonesian Women's Association for Justice (LBH APIK) Jakarta is specialised in providing legal services for women and children. It aims to improve the access to justice for women and children who are experiencing or are at risk of experiencing gender-based violence. LBH APIK offers free access to the marginalized women in society who lack access to resources and helps them minimise the procedures of being re-referred between services.

LBH APIK provides women and girls with legal representation, advice, support, and community outreach initiatives, ensuring that they have access to a service that will help them receive professional legal advice for their cases. Most importantly, LBH APIK works to ensure that their cases are resolved promptly with the appropriate recourses in the justice system.

### SAPA Institute

SAPA Institute is an independent non-profit learning organisation with volunteering spirit that consists of young people focusing on women's issues relating to sexual rights, reproductive health, and women economic independence as well as violence against women.

### Wahid Foundation

Wahid Foundation was established in 2004 with the mission to uphold KH Abdurrahman Wahid's (Gus Dur) vision in encouraging tolerance and diversity in Indonesia, improving the welfare of poor communities, building democracy and fundamental justice, as well as broadening values of peace and non-violence in Indonesia and across the globe. Wahid Foundation facilitates dialogues and building understanding between Islam and other religions and cultures both domestically and globally, including those who live in the Muslim world and the Western world. In Indonesia, Wahid Foundation works with UN Women to lead the Peace Villages initiative to centre women and encouraging young activists as peace agents.

### Yayasan Care Peduli

Yayasan Care Peduli (YCP) has operated in Indonesia since 1967 as CARE and has worked closely with stakeholders across the country to deliver services and assistance to those in need. YCP's work in Indonesia focuses on disaster risk management (disaster risk reduction and emergency response); natural resource and climate change management; health and nutrition; economic empowerment; water, sanitation, and hygiene; and the rights of women and girls.

### Yayasan Plan International Indonesia

Plan International has done its work in Indonesia since 1969 and officially became Yayasan Plan International Indonesia (Plan Indonesia) in 2017. Plan Indonesia is working to fight for the fulfilment of children's rights and equality for girls and women.



# Women at the Forefront

Inspirational stories and  
experiences from the  
Women and Girls at  
the Center of COVID-19  
Prevention Programme in  
Indonesia



From  
the People of Japan

