

Women's Leadership Participation: From the Margin to the Centre. A Case Study of *Sekolah Perempuan* in Enhancing Women's Role in Formulating Equitable Public Policy

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Abstract

Women remain on the margins of public decision-making, especially in development planning and budgeting forums where their voices and interests are ignored. An equitable development, however, requires the active participation of marginalised groups, including poor women, female heads of households, survivors of violence, ethnic minorities, indigenous women, those in remote or disaster-affected areas, gender minorities and individuals with disabilities. These groups face systemic barriers to participation, as men are often perceived to represent the collective voice of their communities. Therefore, women's leadership needs to be established. To overcome this marginalisation, women's leadership must be actively developed. Based on KAPAL Perempuan's experience in empowering women through *Sekolah Perempuan*, this paper explores how grassroots organising and critical education, with the approach of the Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) framework, enhance women's agency, critical consciousness, and leadership. Data collection for this paper utilised interview methodology and literature review. By developing a GEDSI perspective, marginalised women can influence public policies to become more gender equitable and inclusive, ultimately bridging the gap in their participation in development planning and decision-making. Recommendations include integrating the GEDSI approach in local development policies and supporting capacity building for women's participation and community-based empowerment to reach more marginalised groups.

Keywords: Women's Participation and Leadership, *Sekolah Perempuan*, KAPAL Perempuan, GEDSI, gender equality, critical education

Introduction

Population data shows that 50 per cent of Indonesia's population is women. According to statistics from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), there were 137,909,400 women in Indonesia in 2023, compared to 140,786,800 men. The number of poor women in Indonesia is higher than the number of poor men. According to the BPS report, 9.49 per cent of the population are poor women, compared to 9.23 per cent of men. Even in 2024, the gap between poor women and men has widened, with poor women accounting for 9.20 per cent of the population and poor men for 8.86 per cent (BPS 2023). In patriarchal structures, the impact of women's poverty is closely linked to other issues, such as low levels of female education, poor reproductive health, forced early marriage, and limited decision-making power for women.

Kumurur defines this aspect of female poverty as the 'feminisation of poverty', which is the impoverishment of women due to their gender identity or unequal

gender roles. This results in them experiencing poverty and its associated suffering. Kumurur also explains that women have been impoverished through neglect over a long period of time (Kumurur 2010), as illustrated by the following quote:

"Based on Ester Boserup's documentation in Shiva (2005, p. 83), it appears that women became poorer when colonial regulations were introduced. For hundreds of years, rule-makers had subjugated women, leaving them with no skills or education and discriminating against their access to land, technology, and employment."

Women also have diverse identities. In a patriarchal social structure, these identities influence women's social lives. Those who are female heads of households, from ethnic minorities, Indigenous, with disabilities, elderly, girls, victims of violence, and those with minority gender identities and in remote or disaster areas, face specific problems related to the complexity of their situations.

Sukaesih is one of many women who have experienced the cycle of poverty and violence. She is a victim of child marriage from Bidaracina, Jatinegara subdistrict, East Jakarta, DKI Jakarta. She has been raised by her aunt since birth, as her mother died during childbirth and her father abandoned her when he remarried. She grew up in a small, rented house with seven other family members. As a result, she was only able to complete Year 4 of primary school.

She got married and had a daughter when she was 15 years old. Because of her family's economic situation, she was forced to work as a migrant domestic worker in Saudi Arabia. During her two years there, she regularly sent her earnings to her husband. Upon returning to Indonesia, she discovered that he had been unfaithful to her. She then divorced him. To survive, she became a dishwasher at a small food stall. However, she experienced domestic violence again and divorced her husband. It turned out that she had never had any identity documents. Likewise, her marriages had never been registered. This included her undocumented departure to Saudi Arabia. Without identity documents, she could not access social security or other social protection programmes. In 2020, *Sekolah Perempuan* helped her to apply for an identity card (KTP), a family card (KK), and a national health insurance card for recipients of contribution assistance (JKN-PBI).

The question is: how do public policies capture the complexities and diversity of women's situations? How can the voices of women, including marginalised women, be incorporated into policy-making processes? Moreover, how can all forms of women's marginalisation be recognised and documented in development planning policies?

Public participation in public policy decision-making is a regulatory requirement. Government Regulation No. 45 of 2017 clearly sets out the rules for public participation in regional administration. It specifically covers public participation in the formulation of regional policies; planning and budgeting for regional development; the management of regional assets and natural resources; the provision of public services; and public access to information on regional development. The same applies to women's participation. Presidential Instruction No. 9 of 2000 instructs ministers and regents/mayors with the task of mainstreaming gender in national development, including in the planning, drafting, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of national development policies and programmes. However, regulatory mandates do not automatically

ensure that the government involves women and marginalised community groups.

The public policy arena is a battleground where ideas on policy issues are collectively decided upon. Therefore, citizens' participation in these processes is crucial for fostering a participatory democracy within civil society. Furthermore, policymakers interpret these policies differently. As Dunn explains, "policy issues depend on the specific patterns of involvement of policy stakeholders, namely individuals or groups of individuals, who have a stake in the policy because they influence and are influenced by government decisions" (2003, p. 111).

The absence of women and marginalised groups from these spaces means that the interests and needs of these groups are often overlooked in the development policy agenda. The argument used to justify excluding women from these policy spaces is that they are already represented by their husbands as heads of the family. Participation at the level of the family, the smallest unit of society of which women are a part, is considered sufficient representation of the community's voice. In reality, however, the "family" space often becomes the first place where women's voices and aspirations are silenced. Even when women's groups are present, they often fail to represent marginalised women and the various forms of marginalisation they experience.

It is important to emphasise that women have unique experiences due to their bodies. It is crucial that women voice these experiences themselves. Therefore, the mechanisms of representation in public policy decision-making spaces must favour the different interests of women, since bias towards what women need often results in policies that do not reflect women's actual experiences. Dye explains that, in the formulation of public policy, policy will follow the interests of influential groups. In this context, Dye emphasises that "public policy may also be viewed as the preferences and values of a governing elite" (2016, pp. 17-18).

Efforts are needed to encourage women's participation in decision-making at both the domestic-family and public policy levels, for which strong female leadership is required. Women's leadership enables women to express their ideas, negotiate their interests with those of others, and decide on the best choices.

This article discusses women's leadership and participation in public decision-making processes. This is achieved through grassroots empowerment based

on organisation and critical education from a gender and social inclusion perspective. KAPAL Perempuan Institute developed *Sekolah Perempuan*, using feminist methodology to strengthen women's leadership. Several other civil society organisations also use similar approaches. This process enables women to influence gender-equitable and inclusive public policies through development planning mechanisms and decision-making forums, including customary ones. The paper reviews policies, programmes, services and budget allocations resulting from women's participation in development planning. It identifies existing challenges and provides recommendations to strengthen the leadership and political participation of women, persons with disabilities, and marginalised groups in the future.

Research Methodology

This study employs qualitative methods, including a literature review and interviews, to examine the organisational and advocacy outcomes achieved by KAPAL Perempuan Institute over the past 25 years. It examines the various practices that promote women's empowerment, critical education, and advocacy, encouraging their participation in development decision-making processes. This study draws on literature related to women's leadership, feminist critical education, the concept of women's empowerment through *Sekolah Perempuan*, and meaningful women's participation in development planning mechanisms.

Feminist theory and analytical frameworks related to women's participation and leadership are used to analyse the data, as well as the Gender, Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) framework. The GEDSI approach is used by policymakers, planners, academics, activists, and development practitioners to ensure that the rights of all groups, including women, persons with disabilities, and other marginalised groups, are recognised equally in the development process.

GEDSI is a development strategy and approach that addresses inequality, discrimination, marginalisation, and exclusion based on sex, gender, disability and other social identities (e.g., age, ethnicity, religion or belief, race, inter-group, and geographical location). The aim is to enable everyone to participate actively and meaningfully in the entire development process, including decision-making, and to gain access to and control over public resources, services and the benefits of development in a fair, equitable, inclusive, and sustainable manner (INKLUSI 2024, p. 2).

Sara Longwe's five-level analysis of empowerment — welfare, access, critical awareness, participation and

control — is used to evaluate the extent to which women can participate in decision-making processes and control policies that affect their lives and those of other marginalised groups (Longwe 1995). This approach enables researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with promoting more equitable and inclusive policies.

As part of the data collection process for this study, interviews were conducted with nine individuals, including leaders of *Sekolah Perempuan*, community facilitators, and a village head, from areas supported by KAPAL Perempuan in South Sulawesi, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), West Nusa Tenggara (NTB), DKI Jakarta, and East Java. Additionally, the researchers examined the findings from the mapping conducted by the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (KPPPA) regarding the participation of women, children, and persons with disabilities in the *Musrenbang* in 262 districts/cities, to determine their level of involvement and the obstacles they face in the development planning process.

The collected data was analysed using several feminist theories related to women's participation and leadership. Participation of women in the public policy-making process is an important opportunity for women to play an active role in fighting for their interests. From a liberal feminist perspective, achieving political equality for women is considered essential for democratic representation. Liberal feminism emphasises that women should have equal rights in the political sphere, encouraging them to question their rights. This is reflected in the Seneca Falls Declaration of 1848, which was attended by 300 people and called for reforms to marriage laws, divorce, property ownership, and child rights. The Declaration emphasises the importance of women's right to speak and participate in public life. Since then, awareness of women's role in politics and public spaces has increased, leading to demands for their rights (Arivia 2018).

However, as Nancy Fraser points out, simply having women present in deliberative spaces does not guarantee that their voices will be heard. Informal barriers, such as male dominance in conversations and disregard for women's contributions, often hinder equal participation. Jane Mansbridge also emphasises that deliberation can be a "mask for domination", that subordinate groups often find it difficult to articulate their interests, or are even ignored when they speak. In the context of public services, this means that women's needs are often not prioritised. For example, services for

reporting violence and reproductive health education are still considered secondary. Therefore, women's involvement in planning forums must be accompanied by mechanisms that ensure their voices influence decision-making processes and that resulting policies are more responsive to vulnerable groups (Fraser 1990).

"In line with Andrea Cornwall's typology of participation, interactive participation (or meaningful participation) is not merely a means of achieving development goals; it is a right that must be recognised. In a participatory development approach, women's involvement in analysis, the development of action plans, and the strengthening of local institutions enables them to take control of decisions and determine how resources are used to meet community needs" (Cornwall 2008, p. 272).

However, women, especially those from marginalised and disadvantaged groups, still face various obstacles in public decision-making. Although regulations mandate community participation, implementation is limited, and women and other marginalised groups are not always recognised as political and social actors with the right to be heard. This paper demonstrates how a grassroots-based critical education approach, such as that developed by KAPAL Perempuan Institute through *Sekolah Perempuan*, can empower women and enhance their critical awareness when advocating for their rights within the policy arena.

By adopting the GEDSI perspective approach, women and other marginalised groups not only have the opportunity to participate in development planning but can also influence the development of equitable and inclusive policies. The experience of *Sekolah Perempuan* shows that when women have access to critical education and spaces for participation, they can become effective agents of change within their communities.

Women's Leadership

Batliwala, in her book 'Feminist Leadership for Social Transformation: Clearing the Conceptual Cloud', defines leadership as a series of actions and processes carried out by individuals with character, knowledge, and integrity, who have the capacity to create a vision for change, inspire, and motivate others to participate in achieving that vision, develop ideas and strategies to guide and empower others in working towards the intended change, and make critical decisions to ensure that goals are achieved (Batliwala 2010).

Similar to Batliwala, in its reflection, KAPAL Perempuan Institute defines women's leadership as the ability of women to influence their group or followers to achieve certain goals (KAPAL Perempuan 2010). This definition of women's leadership is based on the question of how to define leadership from the perspective of women who are still subject to patriarchal norms. It explains that women's leadership is not only a series of processes in which women make decisions, but also how they define their goals in these processes. The goal of women's leadership is to fight for women's rights, equality, and justice. With this definition, women's leadership can be interpreted as the struggle of women leaders to reclaim rights that have been taken away from them.

Based on the experience of KAPAL Perempuan Institute, women's leadership has been developed over a long period of time. Consistency in this process is important because it fosters women's critical awareness. This critical awareness is the first step in leveraging other instruments of women's leadership, such as commitment, courage, empathy, and resilience.

Until now, female leadership has been suppressed by patriarchal values (Batliwala 2010). Society, and sometimes even women themselves, believes that leadership is a trait that men are born with. To a certain extent, women's involvement in political and public leadership is considered a manifestation of women's public roles, but this does not apply when women return to domestic spaces (Suryakusuma 2011). In the domestic sphere, men regain their power as leaders. Ultimately, distrust of women's leadership means that female leaders have to work harder than their male counterparts to prove their capabilities.

To develop women's leadership, particularly among marginalised women, KAPAL Perempuan Institute has created a model of women's empowerment through organisation and critical education from gender and social inclusion perspectives. Organising and critical education are integral to a single process. Critical education is an important part of community organising because it brings about changes at individual, normative, cultural, and social levels.

Critical Feminist Education in *Sekolah Perempuan*

KAPAL Perempuan Institute has developed a feminist critical education model based on its reflections on critical education theories that have existed since the 1970s. Drawing on Paulo Freire's work in 'Critical Pedagogy', the Institute reflects on how critical

education can raise citizens' awareness of social issues. However, Freire failed to consider gender in his theory. In 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed', Abha Bhaiya and Kalyani Menon Sen explain that Freire does not distinguish women as individuals from men. Consequently, the distinct needs of women resulting from social constructs remain undefined (Bhaiya & Sen 1996).

Sunardi defines critical education as a process of raising public awareness and enabling people to free themselves from situations of oppression (Sunardi 1998). Meanwhile, Faqih in 'Pendidikan Populer: Membangun Kesadaran Kritis', emphasises that, from a critical education perspective, education aims to "create a space for society to engage critically with systems and structures of injustice, encouraging deconstruction and advocacy for a fairer social system" (Faqih 2001, p. 22). These concepts form the basis for efforts to liberate women from entrenched gender norms and patriarchal culture. Such efforts include raising women's critical awareness so they can free themselves from discrimination, subordination, marginalisation, violence, and restrictive domestic burdens. From a feminist perspective, KAPAL Perempuan Institute defines feminist critical education as "an educational model based on a cycle of reflection and action using a participatory approach that empowers and opens up space for those whose voices have never been heard. Most importantly, it is based on women's experiences as a source of authentic knowledge that accelerates the process of raising awareness of women's oppression" (Muchtar 2005, p. 4).

Feminism forms the ideological foundation of KAPAL Perempuan Institute's critical education programmes for women, particularly marginalised women. It shapes the concepts, objectives, methodologies and measures of change resulting from these programmes. Women's experiences are the central reference point for analysis, raising awareness of issues and exploring women's agency for change.

Addressing the issue of women's agency is not an easy task. Parker explains that women's agency arises from the situation of oppressed women, which she terms 'subaltern' - the lowest position in the context of marginalisation. This situation of oppression leads women to make decisions and take action as a form of resistance. In her book 'The Agency of Women in Asia', Parker elaborates on this concept.

Individual agency has often been opposed to forces of oppression and exploitation, institutional power, social structures (such as class) and the power of hegemonic

discourses or ideologies. In the sociological formulation most often quoted until recently, "agency" was pitted against structure. In this formulation, agency is the action of the individual who seeks to escape the constraints of society, and is often taken as "free will" (Parker 2015, p. 4).

Therefore, critical feminist education targeting marginalised groups of women is important because it is grounded in their experiences of oppression as both women and citizens. However, Parker also reminds us that women's agency - their decisions to take action - is influenced by the contexts surrounding their lives. She states, "We need to ask, in what ways might agency be demonstrated in different societies or even different sub-cultures or different circumstances" (Parker 2015, p. 12). This is an important consideration for feminist critical education, which should contextualise its awareness-raising processes based on the diverse experiences of women.

To organise the community and provide critical feminist education, KAPAL Perempuan Institute developed *Sekolah Perempuan*. *Sekolah Perempuan* is a forum in which poor and marginalised women can develop their leadership skills. At *Sekolah Perempuan*, critical feminist education is developed through Gender Justice Education (GJE). KAPAL Perempuan Institute has established five key principles of GJE (Muchtar et al., 2006). Firstly, women's experiences are recognised as a valid source of knowledge. In practice, these experiences provide data for mapping the situation and conditions of their communities. This aligns with the spirit of feminism, which challenges the concept of objectivity—spaces of knowledge interpreted through male subjectivity.

Secondly, there is a continuous process of reflection. In GJE, poor and marginalised women are encouraged to take action to express their resistance within their families and wider communities. These actions are based on a new awareness and perspective, born from reflection on the causes of her oppression. Thirdly, GJE encourages women to see themselves as active participants in history, rather than passive objects of the historical process. GJE raises women's awareness of the fact that the knowledge they have acquired throughout their lives will contribute to history. Therefore, amplifying women's voices is a means of adding a female perspective to history.

Fourthly, challenging patriarchal views on women's bodies. Women's bodies and sexuality are often considered sensitive topics because they have long been considered taboo. GJE creates spaces for critical

dialogue to question the patriarchal subjugation of women's bodies. Issues such as sex, sexuality and women's reproductive health; female genital mutilation; forced marriage and child marriage; gender identity, and sexual orientation are discussed openly to debunk the myths that have long constrained women.

Fifthly, GJE aims to break down the separation between the domestic and public spheres and the categorisation that creates a hierarchy in which feminine

attributes are considered inferior. One view that often undermines women's leadership is the view of women's rationality. This misogynistic view means women have to work twice as hard as men to prove their leadership abilities. In GJE, women are encouraged to fight against the diminishing of the rational and emotional capacities of both women and men. The same applies to other categorisations of values, such as left-brain-right-brain and domestic-public.

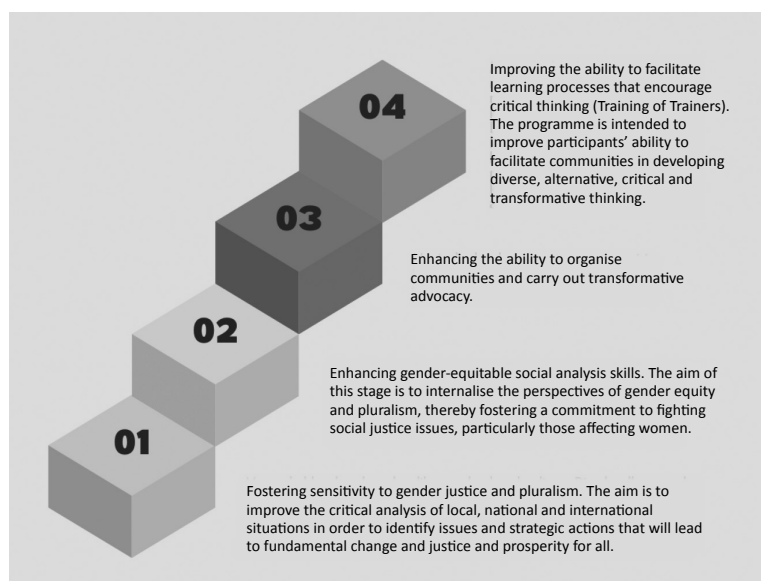


Figure 1. Stages of Feminist Critical Education at *Sekolah Perempuan*

Source: Profile of *Sekolah Perempuan*: Developing Critical Awareness, Women's Leadership for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality, KAPAL Perempuan Institute, 2017

To ensure these principles can be applied to the learning process, GJE uses various interactive educational methods to encourage openness, sensitivity, and dialogue. The methods developed in GJE include 'Rivers of Life', 'Family Tree from the Female Lineage', 'Diorama', 'Role Play of the History of the Women's Movement', drawing, film analysis, song analysis, and other methods appropriate to the situation in which GJE is applied. These methods not only help women develop their critical awareness but also provide a space for them to reflect on their experiences, build courage, and express their ideas and demands.

GJE encourages change in women. Muchtar et al. (2006) mention four aspects of change that occur following participation in GJE. The first one is awareness. GJE enables women to realise that the problems they experience in life are related to their gender identity. Another aspect of this awareness is recognising that the gender inequality they experience is influenced by various factors, and that strong female leadership

strategies are needed to effect change. This will cause women to continuously question the root causes of their oppression. The second aspect is commitment. Awareness of the oppression they experience motivates women to commit to making changes. At this stage, women are also likely to challenge their own socially constructed perspectives.

Thirdly, the political aspect. The political sphere often seems far removed from women's lives because it is associated with formal, public decision-making processes. Various feminist theories, however, view the domestic sphere as a political space — a space in which women can decide on their own roles. Similarly, decisions relating to women's bodies and sexuality are considered to be within their private domain. GJE encourages recognition of women's issues as socio-political, meaning women's struggle for gender equality and justice is political. Fourthly, the cultural aspect. Changes in women, beginning with themselves and spreading to family and community levels, will

ultimately encourage cultural change and a new history that is more open and pluralistic.

History of *Sekolah Perempuan*

Sekolah Perempuan was initiated by KAPAL Perempuan Institute in 2000. It began in two neighbourhoods: Klender in the Jatinegara subdistrict in East Jakarta, and Rawajati in the Pancoran subdistrict in South Jakarta. Around 50 poor women joined *Sekolah Perempuan* at that time. They attended GJE classes regularly every week. As there were no facilities they

could use for learning, they studied in a narrow alley in front of residents' houses. Sitting on mats, they learned about gender concepts, women's reproductive health, women's leadership, setting up women's organisations, and establishing cooperatives. In response to high demand from women who wanted to join *Sekolah Perempuan* but could not read or write, GJE began combining literacy training with its programmes. It was at this stage that KAPAL Perempuan Institute started to combine gender perspective strengthening with life skills development, initially focusing on reading and writing.

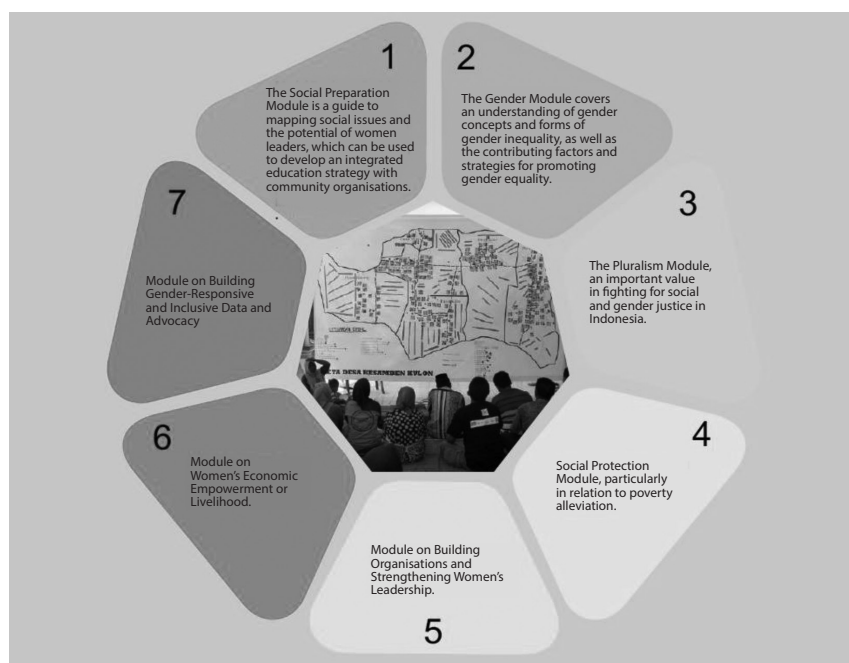


Figure 2. The Feminist Critical Education Module at *Sekolah Perempuan*

Source: Profile of *Sekolah Perempuan*: Developing Critical Awareness, Women's Leadership for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality, KAPAL Perempuan Institute, 2017

Integrating reading and writing methods into GJE materials helps members of *Sekolah Perempuan* who cannot read or write to improve their lives. Dareni, a member of *Sekolah Perempuan* who had been unable to read her whole life, said that she now feels more courageous and confident when travelling, as she can read the public transport routes she uses. The GJE processes also emboldened *Sekolah Perempuan* to advocate for the National Education System Bill.

From poor urban areas, in 2005, GJE was implemented on Nain Island, North Minahasa Regency, North Sulawesi Province. This presented a new challenge for GJE, as it was implemented on a remote island where access to information, transport, and other facilities

was extremely limited. Nain Island is inhabited by two tribes: the Bajo and the Sangihe Talaud. The women of Nain Island, particularly those belonging to the Bajo tribe, hold strong beliefs in myths, including those related to traditional medicine, and therefore rarely access medical services. Health facilities on the island are also not functioning. Health services equivalent to community health centres (Puskesmas) are available on other islands. Another option is for them to travel to the mainland city of Manado, about two hours away by wooden boat, to access hospitals, clinics or specialist doctors. Consequently, women on Nain Island experience various reproductive health issues. The GJE initiative implemented on Nain Island has raised

women's awareness of their reproductive health. It has changed their perspective on the importance of medical check-ups and pushed for the provision of health services on the island.

Sekolah Perempuan then expanded to various regions. By 2012, it had established itself in 24 villages across eight districts and cities in six provinces. The regional context became increasingly diverse, encompassing poor islands and coastal villages, arid regions, villages prone to natural disasters, conservative communities, regions affected by environmental damage, agricultural regions, industrial regions, and Indigenous regions. The contextualisation of GJE learning also became more varied. *Sekolah Perempuan* began using various strategies to address the situation in these regions.

One such strategy, developed at *Sekolah Perempuan* in Pangkajene Islands Regency, was to establish a 'Carpentry Class' to combat the domestication of island women. This class conveys the message that women can do jobs traditionally associated with men. In the class, members learn to make miniature Pinisi boats, which symbolise resistance against the male-dominated public sphere. Over time, the carpentry class became one of their collective economic endeavours. When the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic hit, they also set up the 'Sipurennu' community radio station to support distance learning and to combat child marriage, which became widespread during the pandemic.

This regionally contextualised approach is widespread across all *Sekolah Perempuan*. At the same time, *Sekolah Perempuan* has begun to actively monitor violence against women, public policy, social protection programmes, and development planning mechanisms. This monitoring is carried out through Community-Based Gender Audits (CBGA). *Sekolah Perempuan* has successfully used CBGA to identify issues within the Women's Savings and Loan Programme of the National Community Empowerment Programme (SPP PNPM), and to assess the impact of this social protection programme, which was implemented during President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's tenure, on poor women.

In addition to the SPP PNPM programme, *Sekolah Perempuan* has also monitored the National Health Insurance Contribution Assistance Recipient (JKN PBI) programme, the functions and roles of the Regional Integrated Service Unit for Women and Children Empowerment (UPTD PPA), and the Family Hope Programme (PKH). This monitoring has made *Sekolah Perempuan* increasingly well-known in its community, establishing it as a focal point for community complaints. Subsequently, *Sekolah Perempuan* Complaints Desk was established as a village/sub-district level complaint service centre, which continues to operate today.

The expansion of *Sekolah Perempuan*, alongside its intensive activities and advocacy work, has led to its recognition by the government and various stakeholders. Since then, local governments, particularly in East Lombok Regency, North Lombok Regency, Gresik Regency, and Pangkajene Islands Regency, have replicated the model. In 2020, *Sekolah Perempuan* expanded to other villages, regencies, and provinces. To date, the model has been implemented in 61 villages and sub-districts across 12 regencies and cities in nine provinces, with an estimated 5,300 members.

For around a year, members of *Sekolah Perempuan* study gender concepts, women's leadership, various women's issues, and grassroots women's organisations once or twice a week. They also attend classes on specific themes such as gender-based violence, political education, women's livelihoods, advocacy, village governance, and development planning mechanisms. They apply their knowledge through action, advocacy, campaigns, establishing economic enterprises, lobbying, attending hearings, engaging in dialogue, providing case assistance, and full participation in village, sub-district, district, and national development planning forums.

The following is the roadmap of *Sekolah Perempuan*, which clarifies the process of applying critical feminist education to empower women in various aspects of their lives.

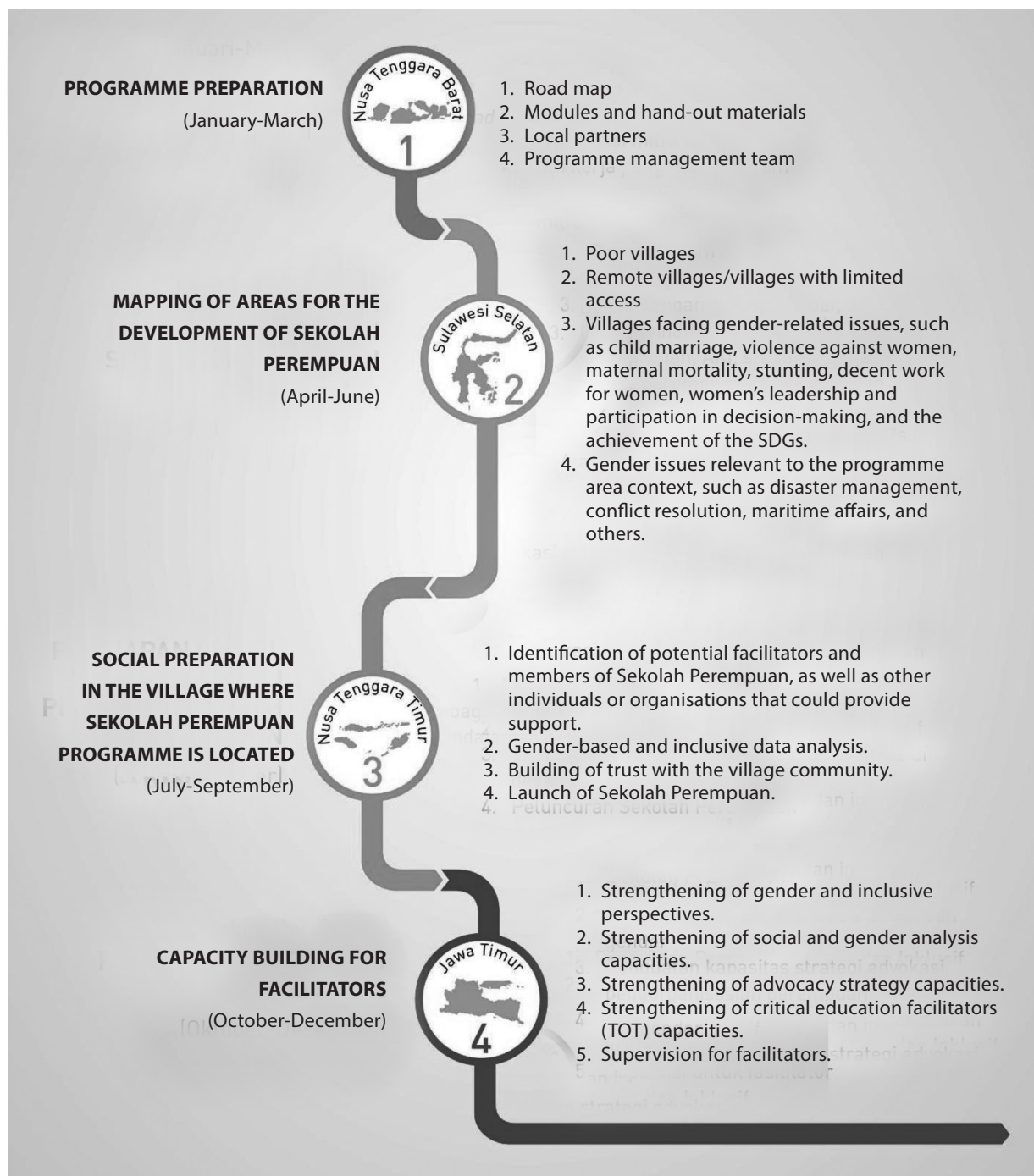


PETA JALAN (ROAD MAP)

DEVELOPMENT OF SEKOLAH PEREMPUAN

MODEL FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT FOR GENDER EQUALITY
IN ALL ASPECTS OF LIFE





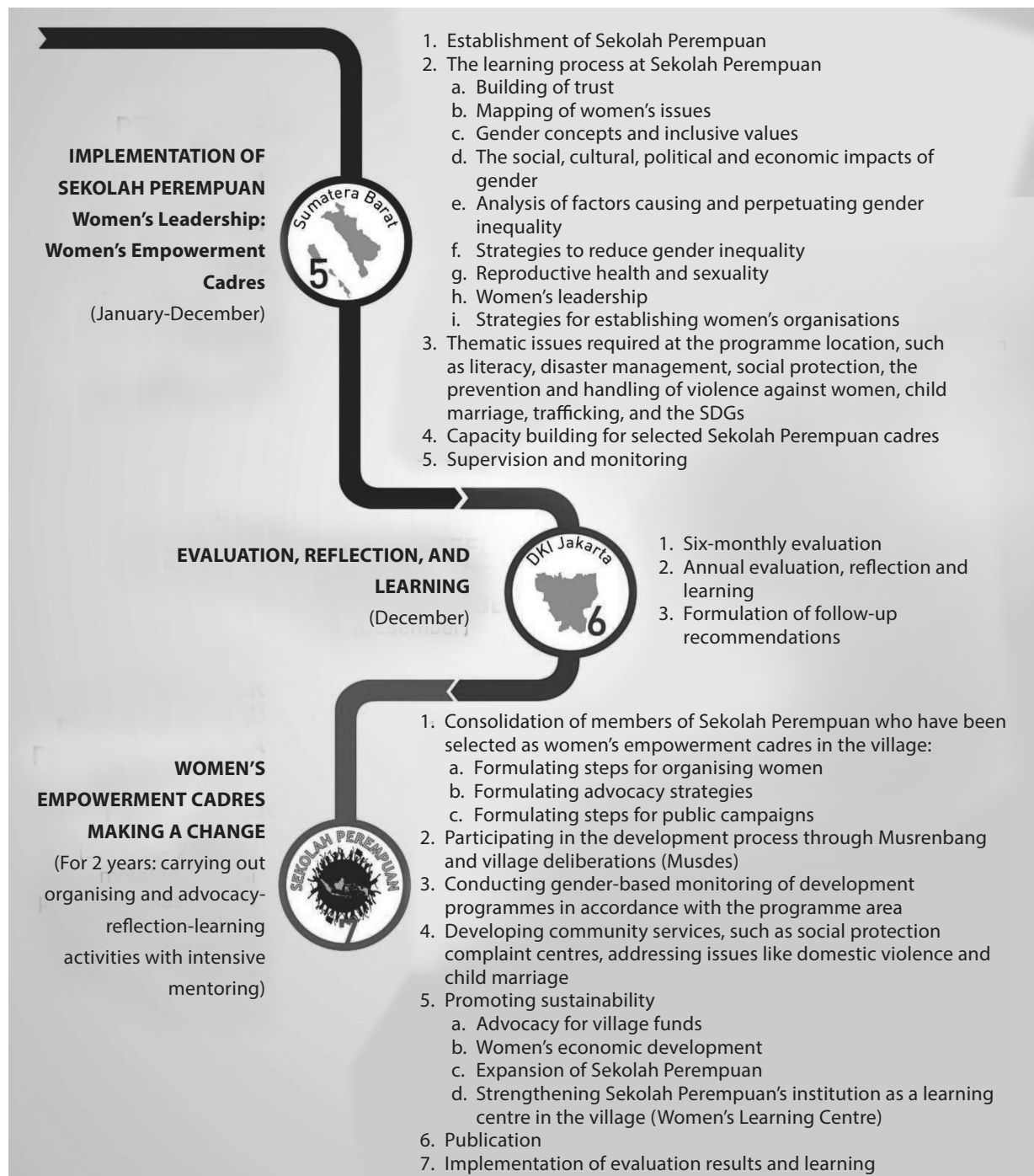


Figure 3. Roadmap of the Development of *Sekolah Perempuan*

Source: Roadmap for the Development of *Sekolah Perempuan*: A Model for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality in All Aspects of Life, KAPAL Perempuan Institute, March 2020

Breaking through Technocracy Boundaries in Development Planning

Sekolah Perempuan uses a critical awareness approach, a gender perspective, and strong social inclusion, as well as knowledge of technocratic development planning, to begin actively participating in and overseeing development planning in their villages.

They insisted on attending the Village Musrenbang. For poor and marginalised women, attending the Village Musrenbang was not easy. They were not considered to have any valuable contributions to make. The village government and community also felt uncomfortable with their presence at this public development planning forum. In one area, *Sekolah Perempuan* was not even

allowed in the room. When they did manage to enter, they were not permitted to sign the attendance list or receive refreshments. The women's group had always been represented at the Village Musrenbang by the PKK organisation alone.

However, when *Sekolah Perempuan* began to gain recognition from the village government as a village women's organisation, it was formally invited to the Village Musrenbang. Structured proposals were developed to make them easier to advocate for. Data was collected, proposals were formulated and agreed upon, and representatives were appointed from *Sekolah Perempuan* to prepare them to participate meaningfully in the forum.

Sekolah Perempuan finds it easier to provide data for problem formulation because it has access to data from the Complaints Desk, the AGBK, and the Participatory Village Mapping. Data is crucial for developing proposals for development planning programmes, as it ensures that programmes are in line with the community's actual conditions. However, village development planning often neglects data, particularly participatory data, meaning that development programmes tend to be implemented in the same way from one planning period to the next. Data also strengthens problem analysis, resulting in more appropriate development programme proposals.

When formulating its proposals, *Sekolah Perempuan* attempted to categorise them according to areas of village development. This made it easier for village administrations to formulate programme nomenclature and budgets. However, programmes and budgets for women tended to be confined to specific nomenclature relating to the empowerment of women and children. In fact, women's and children's issues should be incorporated into all areas. In this context, monitoring *Sekolah Perempuan's* proposals is important.

Proposals passed at the Village Musrenbang are also monitored by the Village Development Work Plan team, known as the Village RKP. Therefore, *Sekolah Perempuan* also urges its inclusion in the formulation of the Village RKP team. This is a significant challenge. Until now, the Village RKP team has tended to comprise village officials,

who are considered to have a better understanding of technocratic development planning. However, given its knowledge of village governance, particularly in relation to development budget planning, *Sekolah Perempuan* has finally been granted a place on the Village RKP team. The Village RKP team ensures that programme proposals from the community align with the nomenclature and become part of the development priority agenda. This is where the leadership capacity of *Sekolah Perempuan* members is tested, as they must make a strong case for the urgent need to address women's issues in the village.

The Process of Influencing Gender-Equitable and Inclusive Public Policy

The participation of women in public decision-making has had a significant impact on the development of more equitable and inclusive policies. This takes place through the regular development planning deliberation mechanism, also known as 'Musrenbang Regular', as well as through deliberations initiated by civil society, including traditional forums for discussion. Outside of the government's regular Musrenbang, those initiated by civil society are highly diverse. KAPAL Perempuan Institute and its regional partner organisations hold 'Women's Musrenbang' events at the village, district, and national levels. At the district level, Women's Musrenbang events are held through Regional Consultation Forums. At the national level, KAPAL Perempuan Institute and other civil society organisations collectively organise the 'National Women's Deliberation for Development Planning'. Several other civil society organisations have also taken the initiative to address issues related to women, persons with disabilities, and marginalised groups. For example, Migrant CARE has held a 'Thematic Development Planning Meeting' for migrant workers and the YAKKUM Rehabilitation Centre and SIGAB have held a meeting for people with disabilities. Additionally, Aisyiyah initiated 'Women and Vulnerable Groups Development Planning Meetings' at village and district levels, while PEKKA and KEMITRAAN held 'Village Discussions', 'Indigenous Women's Forums', 'Stakeholder Forums', 'Transgender Family Forums', and 'Family Forums for Children in Conflict with the Law'.

Table 1.
Stages of Musrenbang and Civil Society Initiative

Regular Musrenbang Stages (organised by the government)	Special Musrenbang initiated by civil society
	Women's Musrenbang at the sub-village level in Tanah Merah Village, Kupang Regency (KAPAL Perempuan, PEKA PM)
Village Musrenbang/Village Deliberation Meeting	Women's Musrenbang and Forum at the Village Level 1. Women's Musrenbang at the village level in 6 villages in East Lombok, North Lombok, and Kupang Regencies (KAPAL Perempuan, LPSDM, PEKA PM) 2. Women's Musrenbang and Vulnerable Groups (Aisyiyah) 3. Village Discussion (PEKKA) 4. Indigenous Women's Forum (Partnership) 5. Transgender Family Forum (PKBI) 6. Forum for Families of Children in Conflict with the Law (PKBI)
Sub-district Musrenbang	Women's Musrenbang and Thematic Musrenbang at the Sub-district Level 1. Women's Musrenbang at the sub-district level (KAPAL Perempuan, LPSDM) 2. Thematic Musrenbang on disability issues at the district/city level (YAKKUM Rehabilitation Centre)
District/City Musrenbang	Women's Musrenbang, Thematic, and Regional Musrenbang at the District/ City Level 1. Women's Musrenbang at the district/city level in North Lombok, East Lombok, and Gresik (KAPAL Perempuan, LPSDM, KPS2K) 2. Thematic Musrenbang on disability issues at the district/city level (SIGAB) 3. Thematic Musrenbang on disability issues at the district/city level (YAKKUM Rehabilitation Centre) 4. Women's Musrenbang and Vulnerable Groups (Aisyiyah) 5. Regional Musrenbang (Pre-National Women's Deliberation for Development Planning) in 11 districts/cities (KAPAL Perempuan, LPSDM, YKPM, KPS2K, PEKA PM, PBT, LBH PA Morotai, Bakumdik)
Provincial Musrenbang	
National Musrenbang	Deliberation at the National Level - National Women's Deliberation for Development Planning

Source: Compiled by KAPAL Perempuan Institute

Women's Musrenbang or Thematic Musrenbang is a key platform through which grassroots women can express their aspirations. They formulate policy recommendations based on their direct experiences and the needs of their communities. Several regions have adopted the results of these deliberations into regional policies that favour women and marginalised groups.

In some regions, women also utilise traditional forums to advocate for their rights and interests.

Although these forums are often dominated by men, women's participation has brought about significant social change. Several Indigenous communities have begun to accept the idea of gender equality, giving women a place at the decision-making table. By breaking through the barriers of patriarchy and successfully becoming members of traditional institutions that have never had female representation before, they are making new history.

The Impact of Women's Participation on Policies, Programmes and Budgets

Women's participation in public decision-making processes has a tangible impact on policies, public services, the economy, culture and education within communities. Strengthening women's participation makes policies and development more responsive to the needs of marginalised groups, ultimately creating more inclusive and gender-equitable governance. The positive impact of women's participation can be seen in various areas of life, from more inclusive policies to social changes that promote gender equality within communities.

Firstly, women's participation has contributed to the promotion of gender mainstreaming in public policy, particularly through mechanisms such as Women's Musrenbang, which enables women to propose programmes based on their actual needs. As participation opportunities have broadened, the resulting policies have become more sensitive to issues affecting women and vulnerable groups.

Secondly, women's presence in development planning enables communities to advocate for services that address their specific needs, including complaint services, information, education, case management, and protection and recovery systems for female victims of violence. Complaint centres at the village level and community-based referral systems are concrete examples of how women can strengthen access to more inclusive public services.

Thirdly, women's participation contributes to improving the availability of gender-specific data. Often, this data is categorised by gender only, failing to describe the more complex situation. A participatory data collection approach enables women to ensure that the resulting data accurately reflects their reality, providing a basis for developing more effective, evidence-based policies.

Fourthly, when women are involved in the planning process, more programmes support women's livelihoods, including providing access to business capital, skills training, and community-based economic development initiatives. The presence of women's economic groups in different villages shows that economic programmes designed with a gender perspective can improve women's welfare and empower them to become agents of change within their communities.

Fifthly, women's participation in public spaces drives social and cultural change within communities. As more

women become involved in decision-making processes, the norms and values that have limited women's roles begin to shift towards communities that are more open and equal for both women and men.

Sixthly, education should not stop at school age. Women's participation in policy-making creates opportunities for lifelong learning, particularly for poor women who previously had no access to formal education. Critical education-based programmes such as those developed at *Sekolah Perempuan* have demonstrated that women can continue to learn and develop their capabilities while fighting for their rights in society.

The experience of KAPAL Perempuan Institute shows that critical education and community organising are increasingly enabling poor and marginalised women to participate in development planning and customary forums, which were previously closed to them. This is evident in the experiences of members of *Sekolah Perempuan*, who have successfully played a role in decision-making at village and customary levels. The following are some experiences of women collected by researchers to inform this study.

Since 2018, Saraiyah, the Head of *Sekolah Perempuan* in Sukadana Village, North Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara (NTB), has been a member of the Sukadana Village Customary Council (MKAD). She made history as the first woman in her village to sit on the MKAD. Since then, she has worked alongside other MKAD leaders to resolve various disputes within the Sukadana village community, including cases of divorce involving child marriage (Setiani et al. 2020). She has had to fight and speak up at Musrenbang meetings at the village and district levels. She has, of course, been involved in lengthy debates at each of these forums. Although some participants at the village-level Musrenbang rejected her proposal on the grounds that it defended the interests of religious minorities, Saraiyah remained firm in her stance. She continued to push for road improvements in the sub-village, where the majority of residents are Hindu. In her view, development should prioritise those in greatest need, regardless of their religious background. Her efforts finally paid off when the village government approved and carried out road repairs in Kebon Patu, one of the sub-villages in Sukadana Village in the North Lombok Regency of NTB.

Similarly, Klara Tawa and her colleagues at *Sekolah Perempuan* in Noelbaki Village, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), pioneered Women's Musrenbang at the village level. This forum has become a strategic means for

women to express their aspirations, enabling proposals for women's empowerment to be incorporated into the Village Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJM). This initiative has had a significant impact, including the enactment of a village regulation requiring 30 per cent female participation in Musrenbang. This policy has encouraged increased female participation in village development planning, reaching around 53 per cent in 2016.

Saraiyah, Klara Tawa, and other members of *Sekolah Perempuan* have influenced public policy, particularly through development planning mechanisms. Firstly, this has led to the creation of gender-responsive policies. Over a period of around 10 years, these efforts have resulted in the implementation of policies at village and regional levels, as well as changes in national policy. In Tanah Merah Village, for example, four village regulations were issued in 2022 that directly address the participation of marginalised groups, maternal and child health, the prevention of child marriage, and the management of domestic violence. Similar policies have been enacted elsewhere, including in Sesait Village in East Lombok Regency, Galo-Galo Village in Morotai Island Regency, and even at the regency level in East Lombok. This demonstrates how women's voices can successfully shape inclusive public policy. Notably, this influence extends beyond formal government structures to customary institutions, which have traditionally been considered inaccessible to women's advocacy. In North Lombok, for example, customary institutions have paved the way for the creation of more inclusive and responsive policies. One example is the *awig-awig* (rules) in villages that regulate the prevention of child marriage and domestic violence.

Secondly, these more inclusive policies have ultimately led to the creation of various programmes that address the specific needs of women and marginalised communities. These include capacity building in financial management, free health check-ups for the elderly, educational scholarships for low-income families, health worker assistance for elderly health posts, economic development training in areas such as animal feed production and weaving, clean water provision for people with disabilities, assistive devices for people with disabilities, and dissemination of information on the Law on Sexual Violence Crimes (TPKS Law), and efforts to prevent child marriage. These programmes respond to community needs and strengthen the position of women in village-level development. In terms of infrastructure development,

which is often a top priority, women have contributed to the construction of roads in a remote sub-village in a village in North Lombok, the building of women- and child-friendly piers on the Pangkajene and Kepulauan islands, and the installation of wheelchair-accessible ramps at village health centres and community halls. The village government also facilitates service rooms for *Sekolah Perempuan's* Complaints Centre and *Sekolah Perempuan's* Community Radio.

Thirdly, securing funding is key to the success of promoting more inclusive programmes, as evidenced by the substantial budget allocations from village and regional funds for women's empowerment programmes. From 2023 to 2025, more than eight hundred million dollars were successfully allocated to the programmes that these groups campaigned for. This demonstrates the direct influence of these groups on public budget decision-making. Budget advocacy also encourages village and regional governments to prioritise allocating special budgets to women, people with disabilities and marginalised groups.

Fourthly, public services have improved, becoming more responsive to the needs of women and marginalised groups and more accessible. For instance, the village government built a ramp for wheelchair users at the village health centre; the Civil Registry Office was present in the village to facilitate the processing of identity documents; and Sign Language Interpreters (SLI) from the East Lombok District's UPTD PPA were available to help disabled victims of violence. Health services were also provided, including free health checks for women, such as IVA and Pap smear tests. In several regions, such as Pangkajene and Kepulauan Regency and Morotai Island, the establishment of UPTD PPA has strengthened protection systems for women and children. More broadly, access to healthcare, transport services, and teaching staff in island areas, as well as the expansion of social protection services, are tangible results of women's involvement in development.

Following the success of the advocacy of *Sekolah Perempuan* in development planning, the recognition of *Sekolah Perempuan* as a grassroots women's organisation in villages has also grown stronger. To date, over 50 village-level *Sekolah Perempuan* have been recognised by village governments as women's organisations at the village level. This creates more opportunities for collaboration with village governments to accelerate gender-equitable development efforts. Conversely, it empowers civil society to monitor development and hold the government accountable.

Evidence based on the experiences of the women mentioned in the preceding paragraphs shows that their presence in development planning mechanisms results in real changes to policy and budget allocation, as well as strengthening more inclusive public services, and is not merely symbolic. Active participation of women in decision-making has paved the way for more equitable and responsive development, particularly with regard to the needs of marginalised groups.

Efforts to promote women's participation in development planning are also being encouraged at the national level. In 2023 and 2024, KAPAL Perempuan Institute, together with other INKLUSI partners, organised National Women's Deliberation for Development Planning meetings. These meetings provided a space for women, people with disabilities, and marginalised communities to voice their aspirations in development planning. The government, particularly the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection and the National Development Planning Agency, has embraced this commitment, emphasising the importance of women's participation in developing more inclusive policies.

One of the main outcomes of the meetings was their influence on the 2025-2045 RPJPN. The deliberations were successfully incorporated into the final version of the RPJPN, including a change to the Indonesia Emas (IE.14) objective from 'Quality Families and Gender Equality' to 'Quality Families, Gender Equality, and an Inclusive Society'. This change was the result of advocacy by civil society, including INKLUSI programme partners. With over 5,000 participants from across Indonesia, the meetings served as a strategic forum for government, civil society, and grassroots communities. Nine priority issues were raised at the Women's National Conference, including women's poverty, women workers, the elimination of child marriage, women's economic empowerment, women's leadership, health, the environment, violence against women and children, and women and children in conflict with the law.

The success of this advocacy shows that women's participation has an impact not only at the village and district levels, but also in achieving more inclusive and gender-equitable national policy changes. Women's active participation in the development planning process ensures that the resulting policies truly reflect their needs and experiences. As women become increasingly involved in decision-making processes, development based on equality and social justice becomes more achievable.

Overcoming the Gap in Women's Participation in Development Planning

Women's participation in development planning continues to be hindered by various structural challenges. A 2024 assessment by the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (KPPPA) and KAPAL Perempuan in 262 districts and cities revealed that women, children and people with disabilities remain underrepresented in Musrenbang. Despite regulations encouraging inclusivity in development planning, women continue to face obstacles to meaningful participation.

The results of this assessment reveal several key issues. Firstly, women remain underrepresented at Musrenbang compared to men, and when they do attend, their representation is often dominated by members of the PKK (Family Welfare Movement). While the PKK is also part of the village community and can understand local issues, grassroots involvement, which experiences various systemic issues at the community level, remains limited. Secondly, the rationale for the inclusion of women in Musrenbang is gender-neutral, with no specific efforts to empower them. As the rationale is gender-neutral, anyone capable of participating is invited, regardless of gender. Local governments tend to invite participants based on individual capacity rather than ensuring a specific women's quota. In some regions, women's representation is not considered important for encouraging community participation. Thirdly, while there are proposals for women's empowerment and for addressing child marriage and sexual violence, in some regions, women's proposals are still limited to symbolic matters such as PKK uniforms. In some districts, there are no proposals for women's programmes at all.

The results of this assessment show that, although women are invited to participate in Musrenbang, their involvement is often meaningless. Fraser asserts that, in stratified societies, public spaces are not neutral, but are structured in a way that favours certain groups and disadvantages others. In the context of Musrenbang, women are invited merely as a symbolic gesture, and there are no mechanisms in place to ensure that they can influence development decisions. This is consistent with Cornwall's typology of participation. Women and other marginalised groups often participate symbolically rather than meaningfully (interactive participation). They often play a passive role in formal forums and have no access to the real decision-making process (Cornwall 2008).

To overcome this, strategic steps are needed, such as decision-making within families; increasing women's capacity through critical education, as carried out by *Sekolah Perempuan*; increasing the quota for women's participation in development; strengthening civil society networks to support more inclusive policy advocacy; and integrating GEDSI perspective into regional development planning to make it more responsive to the needs of marginalised groups. This strategy could significantly increase women's participation in public decision-making, resulting in policies that are more equitable and inclusive for all community groups.

However, various structural obstacles still hinder the implementation of this strategy. Patriarchal culture remains a significant barrier. Women are often not recognised as legitimate decision-makers in public spaces, including Musrenbang. Meanwhile, limited access to information and education means that many women lack the confidence to participate in decision-making forums. The absence of inclusive policies that support women's involvement in the development process exacerbates this situation. Existing regulations do not adequately ensure women's representation in development planning.

Patriarchal culture, which is deeply rooted in the social structure, creates a habitus that hinders women's participation in decision-making spaces. In his work 'Masculine Domination', Bourdieu developed the concept of 'habitus', which he defined as a pattern of thinking, acting and feeling formed through continuous social experiences. This habitus is not merely an individual trait, but rather the outcome of long-term interactions between individuals and social structures (Bourdieu, 2001). Similarly, Bhasin (1993) argues that patriarchy restricts women by confining them to the domestic sphere and distancing them from public and political spaces. In a patriarchal system, women who dare to transcend gender boundaries often encounter stigma and resistance, meaning their participation in decision-making and development forums remains largely symbolic and has no impact on the resulting policies (Bhasin 1993).

Conversely, strategies to increase women's participation also encounter challenges during implementation. There is a low level of understanding of lifelong education for adult women, a perception that critical education is incompatible with the formal education system, and limited human resources and funding to support critical education programmes. Furthermore, social resistance to women's experiences

as a source of knowledge remains strong and is exacerbated by the stigma faced by women who actively engage in their communities.

A lack of government attention to critical education for women is also a significant obstacle. While national education policy continues to prioritise formal education, community education tends to be short-term and skills-based. This means that critical awareness, developed through *Sekolah Perempuan*, receives less policy and funding support.

To overcome these challenges, stronger advocacy is needed to ensure critical education for women is recognised and integrated into the education system and community empowerment. Additionally, building stronger solidarity networks within communities is vital for supporting women who wish to participate in decision-making processes. Creating safe, supportive spaces where women can speak and participate will result in more inclusive policies that truly reflect the needs of all community groups.

Closing

These findings emphasise the need for policies that better support women's participation in public decision-making. To ensure that the voices of women, particularly those from marginalised groups, are heard and accommodated in development planning, key strategies must include integrating the GEDSI approach into regional policies, strengthening the capacity of women and other marginalised groups through critical education, and advocating for more inclusive policies.

Furthermore, local and national governments should adopt the women's empowerment model of *Sekolah Perempuan* to enable more women and marginalised groups to participate in public spaces and development decision-making processes. This approach empowers individuals and strengthens participatory democracy, ensuring that policies truly reflect the needs and experiences of all levels of society. Therefore, integrating critical education into education policy and community empowerment must be a government priority to encourage the broader, more meaningful participation of women in inclusive, gender-equitable development.

However, based on the experience of the KAPAL Perempuan Institute, the government should adopt the women's empowerment model of *Sekolah Perempuan*. Adaptations made by the government often fail to accommodate the model's practices in their entirety and tend to omit the concepts and context behind women's

empowerment. In the context of the feminist critical education ideology that underpins *Sekolah Perempuan*, it is difficult for the government to integrate this ideology. Additionally, budget constraints often pose a technical obstacle. If implementation is not properly monitored, the programme's quality will suffer. There is also a risk of misinterpretation, whereby instead of strengthening the process of women's empowerment, the opposite effect is achieved. Ultimately, successful adaptation processes demonstrate efforts to restore the state's responsibility for providing gender-responsive women's empowerment services. However, a strong government commitment to gender equality and justice is required. Therefore, collaboration between civil society organisations and the government is important.

The expansion of *Sekolah Perempuan* in different places, communities and regions provides interesting insights, particularly with regard to how it can empower women in response to various existing and constantly changing contexts. As mentioned in the introduction, women have diverse identities and complex social lives. Therefore, the concepts and methodologies of feminist critical education employed by *Sekolah Perempuan* must be adaptable and responsive to ongoing changes, particularly in the face of the strengthening of patriarchal culture and religious conservatism.

An important aspect of this process is the role of *Sekolah Perempuan* educators. They must have a gender- and pluralism-informed perspective, be committed to social and women's movements, and demonstrate strong female leadership skills. They also need resilience to organise people over a long period of time. Organising people, especially women, requires courage because the issues addressed by educators may be seen as challenging the social order. In an environment of shrinking democratic spaces, high risks and threats, it is becoming increasingly difficult to generate interest in social change issues, particularly among young people. In this situation, it is necessary to recruit new members to *Sekolah Perempuan* in order to train new *Sekolah Perempuan* educators. Social change does not happen overnight. *Sekolah Perempuan* educators who come from the community itself can sustain the process of social change. Additionally, KAPAL Perempuan Institute must ensure the security and safety of these educators. Moving women from the margins to the centre of decision-making processes is not just about their presence in discussion spaces, but also about ensuring that their voices, experiences, and needs contribute to a gender-equitable and inclusive development agenda.

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