

SUMMARY BRIEF

WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT IN WASH ECONOMIC ACTIVITY IN INDONESIA

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To what extent do women participating in WASH economic activity experience empowerment? This summary presents key findings of research of women's experience of participating in small-scale enterprise and community mobilisation activities.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Amongst research participants, women showed stronger social and environmental motivations compared with economic motivations relating to profit or earning income. A key motivation was to meet friends and socialise, as well as a sense of social responsibility.
2. This study revealed a mixed picture typical of women's empowerment processes more generally:
 - There was significant evidence of experience of self-belief and a perception that women had equal (or greater) capability to undertake WASH activities to men- for instance due to their communication, negotiation and managerial skills.
 - Only some participants experienced support from close relationships that enabled their decision-making, leadership and increased financial independence.
 - Several participants faced challenges due to prevailing gender norms, particularly in relation to negotiation of household duties, mobility and access to financial resources.
3. Enablers that aligned to those in the literature on female Indonesian entrepreneurs were women's ability to learn on-the-job through experiential and informal learning, and the strength of women's networks and communication skills.
4. Reported barriers in this study that were also found in the literature included socio-cultural norms, particularly concerning expectations of women's role in the home which created a challenge to balance reproductive and productive roles, as well as lack of access to finance and restrictions to mobility.

Introduction

Women's involvement in economic activity in the water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) sector in Indonesia is increasing. However, previous research indicated that the majority of WASH economic activity in Indonesia and elsewhere was led by men, and that only a small proportion of women trained were either motivated or able to take up the economic opportunity (Murta et al., 2015; Gero et al., 2015). This trend has been questioned by development actors, given the wider imperative to address gender equality and inclusion. There is also a gap in evidence to date as regards the extent to which women's involvement is beneficial to women and will increase gender equality. This study aimed to fill that gap.

Economic activities in WASH include small-scale social enterprises managing rural water systems, producing, marketing and selling latrines and production and distribution of hygiene products, amongst other activities. Whilst women's participation to date has been low, involving women is important to uphold principles of equal participation, to ensure different WASH needs are met, and because there is potential to improve gender equality through women's empowerment in such roles.

FIGURE 1 SANITATION ENTREPRENEURS AND HEALTH AGENCY STAFF IN LAMPUNG



Women are increasingly involved in small-scale enterprise in Indonesia, however research has shown that they face a number of barriers, and that it is important to consider the terms on which women are incorporated into economic activity, such that decent work principles are upheld and positive benefits flow to those women and their families.

This research was conducted through a research collaboration between Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology Sydney (ISF-UTS) and Faculty of Economic and Business, Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM). It was conducted in cooperation with Plan Indonesia, SNV Indonesia and Water.org in Indonesia.

Methods

This was a qualitative research study. Through interviews with 18 women involved in WASH activities in Indonesia, this research addressed two main questions:

1. What motives lead women to take part in economic activity in relation to WASH?
2. To what extent did women participating in WASH economic activity experience empowerment, including economic empowerment?

These women were located in Sumatra Island, Java Island, Nusa Tenggara Barat (NTB) and Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT), and held a variety of roles (often multiple roles) including business owners (7 women), community mobilisers (9 women) and local government sanitarians (6 women). They were purposively sampled through three NGOs (Plan Indonesia, SNV Development Organisation and Water.org).

The majority of woman participating in this study were 36-55 years old (72%), married (89%), and had university-level education (61%). A semi-structured interview guide focused on participants' personal and family situation, motivations, key enablers and barriers and overall experiences.

How do you measure empowerment?

We examined empowerment using a conceptual framework focused on social relations, and drawing on three main sources (VeneKlasen and Miller, 2002; Eyben, Kabeer and Cornwall, 2008; and Taylor and Perezniето, 2014). In this research, women's empowerment was seen as a process of transforming power relations in favour of women's rights and social justice (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015, p. 404). We analysed research participants' responses against these different aspects of empowerment.

FIGURE 2 LEADERS OF WATER ENTERPRISE IN JAVA



FIGURE 3 TYPES OF POWER

TYPES OF POWER	EXPLANATION	EXAMPLES OF EMPOWERMENT (Eyben, Kabeer and Cornwall, 2008)	EXAMPLES OF ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT (Taylor and Perezniето, 2014)
'POWER WITHIN'	Self-understanding, self-esteem, sense of entitlement to fulfilment of their rights, self-belief to make changes in their lives	Perception that women have capabilities equal to men and are entitled to make own choices	Learning business skills or financial literacy to feel prepared to start an enterprise
'POWER TO'	Decision-making roles in the household, community, and economy - extending to areas traditionally considered as men's occupations or domains	Leadership of women in village-level committees and government agencies	Managing decisions within own enterprises
'POWER OVER'	Access and control over financial, physical and knowledge resources	Ownership and control over land, housing and freedom of movement	Access to credit, paid employment and income-generating activities
'POWER WITH'	Process of group conscientisation and mobilisation to agitate for rights and change the labour and market conditions	Women claiming space to challenge social norms regarding their roles and how they are treated by others	Forming cooperatives, unions and group-based financial services

Why were women taking part in WASH activities?

Economic motivations

Economic motivations are profit-oriented and involve understanding of and interests in business context, opportunities, risks, and development. Less than half of the participants (seven of 18 participants) were driven by economic motivations to earn their main income or to provide additional family income.



The [sludge-removal] business is more profitable than other businesses in this region. This business was actually initiated by my father and continued by my husband until he passed away. Since then, it has become a main source of income.

Those who did showed relatively strong pressures to contribute economically to their family due to illness or absence of male family members, or were using their business to diversify family income as a part-time activity.



This business has stabilised our financial condition.

Social and environmental motivations

'[I am] glad to meet other women [in WASH activities]. [We can] share stories, activities, as well as do monitoring of the program. Then, we laugh together, and the stress is gone.'

Women's social motivations were strongly prevalent and related to the need for interacting with and helping others, including empathy, a strong concept of service and religious beliefs. Environmental motivations reflected women's ecological concerns, such as maintenance of clean water and a healthy living environment.



At first I feel sorry for many elderly people going to the river [to defecate]. I'm sorry to see it...I was from a family with no latrines and a lack of clean water. Well, I do not want people to experience the same thing.



Working in here [at Rural Water Supply Community-Based Organisation] is a manifestation of real action. This work is directed to community service activities, which I love more. Life must be useful for others.

Synergising and conflicting motivations

Several participants had made choices not to develop their work as a business because they saw their WASH activity as an important service to community, rather than something from which to derive personal benefit. In this situation the social motivation was seen to be in conflict with an economic motivation.



I don't want to make it into a serious business since my passion is about serving my community.

FIGURE 4 WOMEN'S MONTHLY MEETING IN LAMPUNG



Also, while not voiced as specific barriers, gendered norms and barriers may have constrained women's consideration to take up the economic opportunity (discussed further below).

Other participants saw taking part in WASH economic activity as both a way to achieve a social purpose and to benefit economically. One participant even saw the business as an avenue to employ other women or marginalised people.



I have a dream of helping the government in achieving access to healthy living. I also have a dream to have females and people with disabilities employed [in my business].

FIGURE 5 SOAP-MAKING AMONG WOMEN WITH THEIR BRAND AND CURRENTLY SEEKING CERTIFICATION IN LAMPUNG



To what extent were women being empowered?

Overall, the study showed evidence of empowerment, as well as constraints to empowerment.

There was strong experience of women's self-belief ('power within'), while experiences of decision-making and leadership were divided between those who felt support from their close relationships ('power to') and those who felt constrained by discriminatory gender norms.

Women's experience of access to and control of resources ('power over') was stronger in access to knowledge and networks than as regards financial resources. Furthermore, women's empowerment was constrained by restrictions in mobility.

The study was not designed to specifically gather evidence on women working collectively to realise women's rights ('power with'), but two cases suggested challenging traditional gender norms may receive some pushback, with uncertain results for women.



POWER WITHIN: SELF-UNDERSTANDING AND SELF-ESTEEM

The majority of women in this study (14 of 18) expressed positive self-esteem and belief that they possessed the necessary skills to perform WASH activities, including some noting that women had equal or superior skills than men.

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Based on my experience, it is easier for me [woman] to get the market [selling the products]. When we talk, women talk more clearly and more fluently.

Individual values such as patience, discipline, responsibility, conscientiousness and persistence were mentioned as specific values possessed by women in WASH activities.

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Women seem to be more disciplined, more responsible for their work. If women are given a target, it will be done.

Women are usually more skilled. Indeed, care should be taken in making toilet pans, because there are many aspects that require the touch of a woman's hand. Usually, men are somewhat less skilled and want to finish quickly.’ ”

Participants tended to feel empowered when their WASH-related activities were aligned with their personal values.

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My dream is to make the five pillars of community-led total sanitation understood by the community. I fell in love [with public health].

For me, this is devotion, my kind of worship. ”

FIGURE 6 SANITATION ENTREPRENEUR IN NTT



POWER TO: DECISION-MAKING AND LEADERSHIP

There were mixed experiences of ‘power to’ make decisions and take on leadership roles. Eight women clearly stated that their family members had positive attitudes and were very supportive towards their WASH activities, including one case where duties were firmly shared.



My family is liberal. From the beginning I never had a division of household tasks [that is unequal]. There is an agreement with my husband, [there is] nothing that cannot be done by the husband, that cannot be done by the wife. We fill each other. That is the deal [since before we got married].

In contrast, other women received negative responses to working in what can sometimes be a male-oriented, technical sector.

‘[At first the responses were] strange. One example, the Head of Village was shocked and commented: ‘Wow, how come? Why do women do this [WASH] activity?’ Another example, when I first shopped for materials at the store and community members [commented] ‘Wow, women do it?’ [shocked]. Because this job is a men’s job, why women can do this?’

Some women followed cultural norms regarding gender roles and engaged in WASH activities without reducing their household tasks, and eight participants responded that they were limited by unequal division of roles.

I know myself. Success is not just success outside (at work), but the family must be successful first.



My principle is if I want to be active in any organisation [for example WASH sector] or whatever, the important thing is that the husband’s needs have to be met first. For example, when I have a [work-related] meeting, at least I have to prepare a meal or something before I attend the meeting. There is freedom, and being responsible as well. It must be balanced [between work and family].

However, some women were still continuing their activities and challenging traditional gender roles.

‘Yes, there are pros and cons about this job [clean water]. Generally, men have the view that it is unlikely that a woman can lead, especially in water sector. This sector is suitable for men. Women cannot do it. But I prove that I can.’

And others experienced empowerment through collaboration with their husbands in conducting their WASH-related business.

In managing the business, I am the manager. I am in charge of marketing and dealing with others including contracts and cooperation. But for technical matters, it is done by my husband. My husband is a quiet person.



POWER OVER: ACCESS TO AND CONTROL OF RESOURCES

The research participants reflected on three kinds of resources, namely knowledge, networks and financial resources. This study found that market-based knowledge in the form of data regarding numbers and locations of households without proper sanitation supported empowerment of some female entrepreneurs.

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My position as a sanitarian provides an incredible capital in running a WASH business. We have data...We know very well about the market, the mechanism, and the competition. If an entrepreneur is not a sanitarian, he or she will always be in contact with the sanitarian for his/her marketing.

Networks were identified by most women participating in a variety of WASH activities as a factor in their empowerment. Networks that were significant to empowerment were the formal and informal relationships between women and external parties supporting their WASH activities.

‘I was involved in the sanitation forum that cooperates with Department of Health. I would produce half-finished products, and the finishing would be conducted in the forum. We also can borrow the toilet mold from the forum.’

Participants in this study showed a range of experiences with access to and control of financial resources to support business development, an important dimension when considering economic empowerment. One example demonstrated challenges cooperating with banks in their work.

I was cooperating with banks for loans, but not again now. Too many barriers because a lot of consumers who do not or cannot pay the loans to banks. So now I decided to stop the cooperation with banks. ”

The freedom of movement required to feel empowered and conduct WASH activities was restricted from some women in this study.

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Men have a more unlimited reach, they can go home at midnight, regardless of the time. I cannot do that, there's [time] allocated for my children. I'm aware of myself. I do not want my children to complain to me. ”

FIGURE 7 SAVING-AND-LOAN ACTIVITY AT WOMEN COOPERATIVE'S MONTHLY MEETING IN LAMPUNG



POWER TO: WORKING WITH OTHER WOMEN, FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS

This study found that that some women had positive experiences regarding 'power with' through collective action and working together in a group, while others had negative experiences. Positive support was given by government to a women's cooperative in Sumatra.

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The government provides good support. Even the head of the village uses his own house as collateral for the material store so that the community can take materials to build latrines and pay in installments. He provides systems for us that make our job as cadre a lot easier.

Unfortunately, not all participants experienced 'power with' through collective support. There were a few who experienced strong resistance from society, especially one participant who was appointed a leadership role in a water collective. After the participant experienced verbal and physical threats from men, the water authority withdrew her appointment from the leadership position and she took an NGO job in another village.

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There were pros and cons. Men looked at [what I did] and commented, 'it is impossible for women to lead this [water cooperative].'

The study also showed a case where women successfully mobilised in a network to improve their conditions in the form of a savings cooperative for women. Initially, it was difficult to convince the husbands to allow their wives to join the cooperative. Despite the men's distrust that women could form the cooperative successfully, they persevered and developed a cooperative of 100 members.

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Some men said 'you know, men's cooperatives have failed and now women want to form one?' They were really doubting us. Some men said to me that a women's role cannot surpass her husband's.



How similar were enablers and barriers for women's role in WASH economic activities as compared with other types of small-scale enterprise in Indonesia?

Enablers

Commonly reported enablers to women establishing and managing enterprises for women in small-scale enterprise in Indonesia included: the effectiveness of experiential learning, and women's aptitude and access to networking opportunities (Leahy et al., 2017). The potential and importance of experiential learning was demonstrated in this study, with seven of the 18 women interviewed reporting although they did not possess tertiary education, they had informally acquired knowledge and skills (including financial literacy). As regards networking, the perceptions of women in this study were that women were stronger than men in forming networks and communicating with customers. Women reported their social networks also supported them to deal with daily stresses and challenges and market their products.

FIGURE 8 TOILET PANS FROM SANITATION ENTREPRENEURS IN LAMPUNG



Barriers

Common barriers to women's enterprise development identified in the literature on Indonesia were: socio-cultural and religious norms, and lack of access to finance and tailored services (Leahy et al., 2017). In this study, sociocultural expectations that women take most responsibility for domestic maintenance and childcare was a widely-reported barrier, and many women reported trying to balance satisfying others' expectations, with self-fulfillment through their family role and role in WASH activities. Whilst the literature mostly pointed to religious norms as a barrier, this study demonstrated the role of organised religion, Islam and Christianity, as both a barrier (as regards expected women's

roles) and an enabler (as regards women's sense of service and religious duty) for women's participation in WASH-related economic activities. Finally, this study identified lack of access to finances as a barrier to developing WASH activities, in line with similar challenges reported in the literature. Participants in this study also did not access formal business development services, with the exception of training from non-government organisations, mirroring the evidence in literature concerning the absence of tailored business support services for women.

FIGURE 9 WOMEN'S INFORMAL COOPERATIVE LEADER AND MEMBERS IN LAMPUNG



FIGURE 10 MAIN ENTRANCE TO CANDIPURO VILLAGE IN LAMPUNG AS A SYMBOL OF PRIDE OF THEIR ODF ACHIEVEMENT



Conclusion and implications

WASH lies in the traditional domain of women (in terms of water management and household hygiene), and it has therefore been recognised as a sector which can offer an entry point for gender equality and women's empowerment.

The findings indicated that several participants, although provided similar opportunity and initial knowledge through training from government and NGOs, were interested to participate in and contribute to WASH activities, but not necessarily in return for income, as an economic activity, and that if women are to be economically empowered through WASH, new and different strategies may be required.

One potential is to facilitate cross-sharing between those women achieving economic empowerment through WASH activity with those who are reticent to try, and another is to provide access to social entrepreneurship training, which combines a focus on social and economic benefits.

In addition, since networks were a key enabler for women to be empowered in WASH activities and a strong source of motivation, it may be worthwhile for development agencies to consider pathways to enhance networks, for example through business forums, community-based associations, or women's groups.

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FIGURE 11 SOAP LABELS IN LAMPUNG



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