Policy Brief

UN WOMEN

PEACE VILLAGES INITIATIVE: STRENGTHENING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP THROUGH A COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACH TO PREVENTION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN INDONESIA

Summary

This brief presents findings from a study exploring the Peace Village Initiative in Indonesia, supported by UN Women and implemented by the Wahid Foundation since 2017 in East, Central and West Java. The Peace Village Initiative uses a community-based women's economic empowerment approach to prevent violent extremism at the local level.

This study used participatory data-gathering approaches to explore the progress and achievements in implementing the Peace Village Initiative. It included a scoping study to identify locations and approaches to expanding the Peace Village Initiative outside of Java.

This brief supports future expansion of the project and highlights the value of adopting a gendered approach to preventing violent extremism. A detailed report on the Peace Village project was also produced as part of this research. Based on these findings, this brief details the Peace Village Journey across the project's three phases along with its key achievements.

An approach to selecting future locations outside of Java, along with a shortlist of specific locations, is also presented, along with approaches to community engagement. The brief concludes with recommendations for future phases of the Peace Village Initiative based on the review's findings.

Why adopt a gendered approach to preventing violent extremism in Indonesia?

Preventing violent extremism (PVE) has been an increasing priority for the Government of Indonesia. Over the years, government policy has shifted to adopting a more holistic approach to prevention, including an increasing focus on marginalization and gender. This shift reflects the growing recognition of women's role in violent extremism, including perpetration of extremist acts, the intergenerational transfer of extremist beliefs from mothers to children and their assumption of a broader role in setting and maintaining community norms.[1]

Marginalization and disempowerment are understood as core components of this radicalization, which is driven by a combination of ideological resonance and social and emotional benefits (e.g. a sense of purpose, empowerment and belonging) that is shared among members in the group.[2] A gendered approach to preventing violent extremism addresses the systemic vulnerabilities that women face, and recognizes how the multiple facets of their identities – including age, ethnicity, education, gender identity and disability – can contribute to marginalization. It also sees women as valuable actors in prevention at the community level and aims to remove practical and social barriers to their participation and leadership in PVE work.

Extremist groups have exploited the uncertainties and hardships associated with the COVID-19 pandemic to undermine people's trust in national governments and to advance their agenda.[3] From the perspective of human security, risk factors for participation in violent extremism are uncertain and complex, involving varied combinations of personal, relational, ideological and structural conditions.

This understanding of the shifting dynamics and multidimensional drivers of radicalization is manifest in Indonesia's National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism that Leads to Terrorism, passed in 2021. Although gender equality and women's empowerment animate all actions across the NAP's three pillars, these are particularly central to the NAP's prevention pillar, which includes a gendered perspective to address holistic drivers of extremism.

The government's approach to PVE also relies on contextual coordination at the subnational level. The establishment of the Coordination Forum of Terrorism Prevention (FKPT) in several regions in Indonesia constituted a further step in supporting the National Counter-Terrorism Agency (BNPT) to carry out its duty and missions at the local level. This structure provides a further basis from which PVE programming can be implemented at the community level.

What did the Peace Village Initiative look like and achieve?

The Peace Village Initiative, implemented by the Wahid Foundation since 2017 with the support of UN Women and other donors, is an ambitious initiative that aims to address the drivers of extremism by mobilizing community members, especially women, to promote social cohesion. The initiative is UN Women's first PVE project globally and aims to achieve the following outcome:

> **Women achieve meaningful participation and leadership in conflict prevention, resolution and recovery to promote social cohesion and sustainable peace.**

This brief supports future expansion of the project and highlights the value of adopting a gendered approach to preventing violent extremism. A detailed report on the Peace Village project was also produced as part of this research. Based on these findings, this brief details the Peace Village Journey across the project's three phases along with its key achievements.

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To do so, it builds on research linking women's marginalization to radicalization, and sees economic empowerment as a strategic entry point for building social bonds among community members, increasing economic opportunities and therefore making the community less vulnerable to conflict.[4] The Peace Village Initiative was part of the Women Participation for Inclusive Society (WISE) project implemented across three phases, each with a different focus of activities.

WISE 1 focused on the selection of potential Peace Villages and engagement with communities' villages, followed by WISE 2 which focused on providing support to women groups, establishing task forces and building a network with the local government. In WISE 3, the initiative provided further support to women's groups and *pokjas* (task force to design village action plan, to establish a gender-responsive community mechanism and to support communities in response to the COVID-19 situation).

Through the review, the Peace Villages Initiative used creative solutions, such as women's economic empowerment as an entry point; supported community mobilization; created a concept for a needs-based response; engaged in capacity-building and coordination for women's participation in decision-making at the community level; and, most importantly, adopted the programme to provide support for those impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures taken to mitigate the impact.

However, there is also room for improvement: for example, enhancing the inclusion of marginalized communities, such as youth and people with disabilities; strengthening the commitment of local government to Peace Villages; providing a coordination mechanism between local and national stakeholders; and better utilizing already existing community mechanisms.

Phase	Key steps in the Peace Village journey, from people's perspectives
WISE 1 (2017 - 2018)	• Initial engagement with women's groups or village officials • Establishment of women's groups specific to the Peace Village project and provision of women's economic empowerment support (training, business development support) to these groups • Establishment of *pokja* (working group) for the project • Peace Village declaration • Women's groups joined cooperatives • 377,473 direct beneficiaries
WISE 2 (2018 - 2019)	• Declaration of 10 Peace Villages • Peace Villages' women groups participated in women's economic empowerment support • End of first engagement • 860,722 direct beneficiaries
WISE 3 (2019 - 2021)	• COVID-19 assistance of IDR 67-68 million grant to declared and initiated Peace Villages • Second engagement with village officials • Establishment/renewal (additional training and new membership) of *pokjas* • Development of Action Plans to implement the Peace Village principles • Training on radicalism and preventing violent extremism • Establishment of Women's Forums in some declared Peace Villages • Establishment of early warning or response system in some declared Peace Villages to respond to gender-based violence against women and children • 24,087 direct beneficiaries

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE PEACE VILLAGE INITIATIVE SINCE 2017 INCLUDE:

18
declared Peace Villages

10 Action Plans produced and 2 village-level regulations issued for the implementation of Peace Village project

Villages that have adopted the Action Plan in their village regulations received a US$ 4,000 grant to implement the plan

14 *pokja* (working groups) groups established and formalized by Village/Kelurahan Head to design and implement community action plan in the village.

6 Women's Forums established to encourage women's participation in decision-making

KCD cooperative provided a total of IDR 1 billion in loans from 2017-2018 alone

Previous work by UN Women,[5] along with this study, have documented many instances of positive changes among women participating in the study at the individual level, including improvements in skills related to planning and facilitation and knowledge of business principles. Both training and Peace Village activities allowed women to develop their leadership and facilitation skills in promoting peace and gender equality at the community and village level.

Many women also found the women economic empowerment training and support to be useful and improved their confidence in growing their business. In addition, *pokja* members and village officials noted the Peace Village declaration motivated them to participate in the initiative activities as the declaration was considered prestigious and a mark of their achievement in creating peace.

Where can the Peace Village Initiative be expanded outside of Java?

Potential locations for expansion

In addition to analysis of the progress and challenges of implementing the Peace Village Initiative, the study scoped for potential expansion of locations outside of Java through remote consultations with local key stakeholders, taking the relevance and acceptability of project approaches into account. The study proposed future support for the Peace Village Initiative in West Nusa Tenggara, Maluku and Central Sulawesi.

These provinces were selected based on an analysis of patterns of violent extremism, prevalence of gender-based violence and existing active women's groups or organizations. Consultations with stakeholders in these locations deepened this analysis and confirmed local support for the aims of the project, its relevance to each context and an acceptance of its approaches. Based on these consultations, priority locations in each province are included in the report to serve as the basis of the project expansion plan.

How can expansion processes strengthen the Peace Village model?

A multi-step scoping approach will ensure the relevance of the initiative and tailor key activities to the needs of each community.

Implementing partners can accomplish this through a **desk review and mapping** of each potential project location that includes assessing the relevance of PVE and conflict in the location, mapping of recent PVE, women's empowerment and peacebuilding programming in the area and previous programming. Following this, a **community assessment** should be carried out to ensure the initiative is appropriate for the context and tailored to people's needs and priorities.

This assessment was piloted for this study and comprises individual or small group consultations, participatory community mapping, a group exercise to define peace and discussions using short statements and scenarios related to peace or extremism. Local leaders and policymakers should be engaged in these processes to assess support and build buy-in from the initiative from the start.

Recommendations for policymakers and project implementers

- Continue to support community-based approaches to PVE that prioritize gender and other dimensions of marginalization, especially groups at risk of violent extremism.

- Build buy-in among village officials and other key decision-makers as first step in engagement process.

- The Peace Village Initiative could tap into existing village development and planning structures and build on existing community or women groups and local structures to address conflict or extremism.

- Ensure that approaches to PVE utilizing non-traditional entry points, such as women's economic empowerment, link these strongly to a Theory of change on PVE.

- Create opportunities for community members and local leaders and policymakers to share information and emerging concerns with each other regarding PVE. This opportunity can also be extended to declared Peace Villages to share their success stories and lessons learned from engagement with the initiative, which can feed into future policymaking.

- Establish a clear metrics of success related to PVE and engage the community to provide regular feedback. These may be used to feed into national, regional or provincial-level PVE tracking systems.

- Continue to learn from and adapt to successes and challenges of early iterations of the Peace Village Initiative to inform future programming and policies.

Conclusion

This brief has presented the key findings related to project achievements and expansion from the Review and Scoping Study of the Peace Villages Initiative in Preventing Violent Extremism in Indonesia. It aims to support future iterations of the Peace Village Initiative, and underscores the need for localized approaches to PVE and the importance of the BNPT's subnational approaches, including the FKPT.

It has highlighted the key successes of this ambitious initiative and considered approaches for expansion. The shortlist of locations provides a clear path for project expansion outside of Java, and a roll-out approach to improve the relevance of its design and activities. Recommendations provided in this brief aim to strengthen the current model in both existing and new locations. Future support for this initiative should take account of these recommendations to maximize the impact of the project and its contribution to the Government of Indonesia's PVE efforts.

Endnotes:

1. United Nations Development Programme, Indonesia, "United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, European Union reaffirm support on preventing violent extremism in Indonesia," press release, 7 October 2020.

2. N. Nuraniyah, "Not Just Brainwashed: Understanding the Radicalization of Indonesian Female Supporters of the Islamic State," Terrorism and Political Violence, 30(16), 2018.

3. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Preventing Violent Extremism in Indonesia during COVID-19 and beyond, https://www.unodc.org/documents/southeastasiaandpacific/Publications/2021/indonesia/Main_COVID_CT_Indonesia_PRINT_EN.pdf

4. Jacqui True and Sri Eddyono, Preventing Violent Extremism: Gender Perspectives and Women's Roles (Monash Centre for Gender, Peace and Security, Monash University, 2017).

5. Peace Village Digital Storybook, Commissioned by UN Women, 2021. https://pvstorybook.un-guyub.id