

Placing youth at the heart of Indonesia's future

Rutgers

Power to You(th) Indonesia



Child marriage is found in geographical pockets throughout Indonesia. Rates vary widely across the country. By 2023 an estimate of almost 7% of the girls is married before 18.

Power to You(th) Indonesia is strengthening young people's capacity to claim their civic rights and become involved in decision-making on issues that matter to them. Young members of civil society organisations are building their leadership and self-confidence, so they can actively participate in the development of strategies and policies related to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and address harmful practices, including female genital mutilation, child marriage, sexual and gender-based violence and unintended pregnancies.

Strong platforms for sharpening and raising young people's awareness

Village Children Forums (FADs) have emerged as strong platforms for young people up to

18 years old. "It is an extraordinary phenomenon. A dedicated institution for young people. A place to fight for their aspirations, so the issues covered in the Power to You(th) programme are accepted by community members", says Nurhadi Kasduri, project manager for Power to You(th) partner Tanoker.

"Village Children Forums embody the spirit of placing youth at the heart of Indonesia's future. They serve as an instrument to socialise and bring awareness to the community members. FAD members who belong to other youth-based organisations at village level are able to spread their influence, slowly receiving positive appreciation from local elders, village officials and religious figures."

Rizky's business: an agent of change

Rizky Sukmawati is a FAD member in Lembengan village in Ledokombo District, Jember Regency. Her aspiration is to bring change and protect children from harmful norms.

“Be brave and confident. Then, be disciplined in anything, especially time discipline. Join an organisation because you can get a lot of experience, especially public speaking, or we can start from small things like leading group work or discussions.”

Rizky Sukmawati, a FAD member in Lembengan village in Ledokombo District, Jember Regency

Through the knowledge and skills obtained from Power to You(th) training, Rizky now has the self-confidence to be a changemaker and bring awareness for young people and the community around harmful practices like child marriage.

She educates parents' groups not to arrange marriages for their children under 19 years old and engages with parents and children about to commit child marriage. She informs them about the risks, building awareness and putting an end to the practice. Through her active role in the FAD and other community activities, the head of Lembengan village appointed Rizky as assistant to the head of village planning. She has actively lobbied the local government to budget for work to help raise the legal age of marriage.

“The impact of me joining the FAD trickled down on other friends who initially did not know about the village youth forum. Once they learned about it, they joined the village youth forum and finally were able to speak up. I am very grateful to Tanoker, Rutgers, and Power To You(th) who have given space to all of us,” Says Rizky.

In meetings between parents and religious and community leaders, Rizky shares her thoughts on harmful social norms, such as early marriage, so they can discuss and take concrete actions to

overcome them. She has given testimonials to health educators about the importance of reproductive health knowledge for adolescents. With this testimony, health workers can educate young people about their reproductive health and other health

“If we do not fight then nothing will change. Be brave to speak up and strengthen the argument...”

Rizky Sukmawati

services, including how to access them, so they can make responsible, healthy and well-informed choices about their future.

Braving the backlash

For a young woman living and working in a setting where social and gender norms limit her opportunities, and where violence against women is often normalised, perhaps Rizky's bravest and most powerful contribution has been on the issue of sexual violence.

She has demanded that habits considered trivial and ordinary, such as non-consensual touching of a woman's body, must be questioned and taken seriously as sexual harassment.

“In our community, people do not consider catcalling as harassment. Neither is touching (without consent). Only rape is considered harassment. Now people come to understand, harassment is not when we are raped, but catcalling and touching (without consent) is also included as harassment.”

Rizky Sukmawati



Her courage to speak up, take real action and break the taboo is inspiring other young people to be sensitive towards situations that are not gender equal and that discriminate against women.

A change agent can help address gender-biased attitudes in society and help criticise the patriarchal norms that are flourishing. Doing this can help people review and question such views and help form new social norms that promote justice and equality.

If no one speaks up, beliefs that make this behaviour seem acceptable will continue. But when people start to question these actions, it sparks conversation in the community, which can lead to real efforts to end it.