

1.2. AMPLIFYING THE VOICES OF WOMEN IN INTERFAITH SETTINGS

THE ASIAN MUSLIM ACTION NETWORK (AMAN) INDONESIA



How this story represents an international-local faith partnership in MEAL



International element

Internationally operating German Protestant faith-based donor organisation



Local faith element

Coordination by national Islamic faith inspired organisation, partnerships with Muslim and Christian local faith actors



Project country

Indonesia



Website

<https://amanasia.org/>



The organisation and project

The Asian Muslim Action Network (AMAN) is an Indonesian interfaith organization that has been working in the areas of peacebuilding, development, and humanitarian aid for 20 years. AMAN believes in the values of truth, justice, compassion, freedom, and equality as embodied in Islam. Its vision is to build understanding and solidarity among Muslims and other faith communities in Asia, with a view to working towards empowerment, women's rights, human rights, gender equality, justice, and peace. The organisation aims to achieve this through an

Islamic approach to contemporary societal challenges, inspired by the values and principles of the Qur'an, Sunnah, and Islamic tradition.

From October 2017 to September 2020, AMAN implemented a project aimed at promoting gender justice from within an Islamic framework. The project 'Amplifying the voices of interfaith women groups - asserting the values of gender justice, peace and tolerance in nation-building' was run in six provinces of Indonesia (Jakarta, West Java, East Java, Central Java, Yogyakarta and Central Sulawesi). The German Protestant faith-based organisation, Bread for the World,

who AMAN has been working with since 2009 funded the project. The project took a bottom-up, grassroots approach to promoting the role of women, youth, and minority groups in peacebuilding by encouraging change on the individual, relational, structural, and cultural level respectively. It supported women in exercising leadership roles in their communities, helping prevent violence against women, and mobilising the community to promote gender justice, peace, and tolerance. AMAN's work with female ulemas, as part of the project, is based on a strategic decision of affirmative action to include women. The female ulemas act as multipliers, utilising their networks and their role as teachers and educators, and providing scholarly input on Islamic scriptures.

MEAL approach and rationale

AMAN has a designated Design, Monitoring and Evaluation (DME) Manager who oversees the organisation's MEAL work, which is informed by three principles.

1. First, a Result Mapping approach permits the measurement of the four levels of change the project aims to bring about (individual, relational, cultural, structural) and maps inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impacts of the programme intervention on these four levels.
2. Second, AMAN's MEAL measures are based on a participatory approach. The process of planning, assessment, information-sharing, observation, and analysis involves the programme management team, beneficiaries, religious leaders, local government, local partners, and local faith actors, such as local

churches or Muslim faith-based organisations. The process is characterised by collaboration, problem-solving orientation, creative forms of knowledge generation, and the use of multiple methods. AMAN adopts this participatory approach in order to determine the root causes of core issues, the needs and aims of various stakeholders, and how buy-in can be ensured. Engagement with government and civil society groups is crucial from a sustainability perspective. AMAN will not be able to run the project infinitely, so long-term success is more likely to be achieved with support from existing agencies and networks. Since AMAN is not a religious organisation itself, the inclusion of religious scholars helps to frame issues such as Islam, gender justice, democracy, and peacebuilding.

3. Third, the organisation's MEAL approach is informed by Appreciative Inquiry (AI), which is based on the assumption that questions and dialogue about power, success, values, hopes, and dreams are all transformative. AI appreciates every effort made by the various parties and recognises change made at the slightest level and scope. It recognises that every person can be a peace agent, mediator, negotiator, leader, and stresses that every small piece of a chain is important. AMAN's role in this process is not to solve problems, but to facilitate the process and connect project participants with others on a local, national, regional, and international level. The organisation relies heavily on affirmative action and appreciative approaches to help empower the women it works with, who are marginalised by the patriarchal society they live in.

Participatory planning, monitoring, evaluation, and dissemination

The Design, Monitoring, and Evaluation process at AMAN is kicked off by a consultation with the project target groups in the form of a strategic planning forum. In the case of this project, the forum was attended by women-led interfaith grassroots organisations, female clerics, youth groups, civil society organisations networks, representatives of ministries and government institutions, and other subject matter experts. The aim of this forum was to determine the framework of the project, agree on indicators for success based on existing baseline data,

and help inform the development of the MEAL plan. It helps to communicate project aims and activities to relevant stakeholders and ensures buy-in.

Once the project had started, AMAN conducted semester monitoring with 10 staff members and 20 stakeholders. AMAN consulted with these participants in focus group discussions and interviews every six months. Stakeholders included male and female community leaders, male and female religious leaders, local and national government officials and teachers, amongst others. Data collection took place in



selected communities, which were selected based on programme context, strategy, and their achievement of programme aims. At times, it was necessary to take gender dynamics into account during the data collection process. Examples include when some female respondents were hesitant to share intimate details about their lives with the male DME Manager or when female focus group members felt more comfortable sharing their views directly with the MEAL team. Adjustments to the MEAL process to take gender dynamics into account were in line with the project's overall objective to amplify the voices of local women. The generated data was analysed and compiled into 6-monthly project progress reports, which were then circulated to donors and project beneficiaries.

Moreover, AMAN conducted a mid-process and final evaluations, focusing on the five DAC-OECD criteria relevance, efficiency, effectivity, impact, and sustainability. The mid-term evaluation included presentations by AMAN staff and target group beneficiaries on achievements, lessons learned, effectiveness, and project impact. The final evaluation, which was conducted by an external evaluator, also included an institutional analysis of AMAN's strengths and weaknesses.

Another key milestone for the AMAN MEAL process is the organisation's Annual Meeting, which is used to report on progress, challenges, and good practices. It allows stakeholders and experts to provide input, gives policymakers and practitioners an opportunity to receive practice-based recommendations, and helps AMAN consolidate their MEAL data. At the Annual Meeting, project participants give presentations, which are complemented with input by

academics and religious scholars, who link the participants' experiences to wider debates. The discussions at the Annual Meeting then feed into AMAN's Annual Report. Consequently, this report does not simply provide the organisation's perspective, but also includes input from key partners. In addition to these annual meetings, the organisation holds a conference every three to four years, which is aimed at sharing learning and strengthening AMAN's international networks.

Lessons learned

Comprehensive and participatory approaches

Comprehensive, participatory approaches that are integrated from the planning to the implementation, evaluation, and knowledge-sharing phases of a project allow beneficiaries' needs to be taken into account, broad coalitions to be built, capacities to be shared, and learning to be promoted. They help with the sustainability of project activities, as strengthened local capacity can rely on existing networks.

Gender dynamics during affirmative action projects

Working with marginalised groups, such as female ulemas and women's organisations can be used as a form of strategic affirmative action to help amplify the voices of women and other minoritised groups. Such an approach can help ensure the views of marginalised groups are taken into account, while simultaneously building their capacity. Existing gender dynamics may need to be taken into account during MEAL processes

when working on projects with an affirmative action focus. For example, in the case of this project, there was a need to take gender dynamics into account during data collection phases, such as when female focus group participants did not feel confident enough to voice their views in public, or when interviewees felt uncomfortable sharing intimate project-relevant information with a male DME Manager.