

The Role of Lembaga Gemawan (NGO) Encouraging Women's Political Participation in West Kalimantan

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Abstract

Women's participation in political activities in Indonesia has grown since the reformation era in 1998. Democracy believes that every single person has an equal right to participate in politics and there is no one left behind. The affirmative policy regarding the women participation in politics has been regulated in Article 65 paragraph (1) of Constitution No 12 of 2003 which mentions that at least 30% of parliament members should involve women as representatives. However, in reality there are many cases that show that women always become a second party who has the privilege to participate in politics. Lembaga Gemawan is one of the local NGO in West Kalimantan which focus on women empowerment including political participation. This Article discusses the role of NGO (Lembaga Gemawan) encouraging women participation in local politics in West Kalimantan. This research used a descriptive qualitative method. The research results show that the Gemawan Institute has a positive role in encouraging women participation in local politics in West Kalimantan through two strategies, 1) establishing empowered women's communities at the local level such as the Mempawah Regency Women's Union (SPKM) and the Kayong Utara Regency Women's Union (SETARA); 2) organized a strategic course on winning women candidates at the provincial level by providing political education for women candidates.

Keywords: Women, Political participation, NGO, Encouraging, Affirmative action, Local

INTRODUCTION

The issue of gender equality in public spaces, especially in politics, has been debated for many years. As "gender equality," one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), becomes a value that feminists work for, it becomes necessary for all countries to include this value in their policy rules. The women's movement realizes that there is a gap

between men and women in terms of righteous equality. Women activists have started to speak out against the patriarchal system that keeps gender inequality in place. They do this through academia, the media, and non-profit groups. This awareness eventually grew into a more organized group movement, which led to the creation of many legal tools to protect women's rights in different fields.

Studies on women's participation in politics have significantly increased in the last decades and have become an

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important area of political inquiry. This development is in line with the general trend of gender equality that has been popular over the course of history. One of the earliest studies can be traced back to a book written by a well-known political theorist, Sidney Verba, Nie, and Kim (1978) which compares the political equality, including by gender, in Japan, the Netherlands, Nigeria, the United States, Yugoslavia, Austria and India. While the studies on gender have been dominantly perceived as "Western" or "European"-centric, which has been represented by the study conducted by Pippa Norris on participation of women in legislative bodies in Western Europe (Norris, 1985), inquiries in non-Western world have also emerged, such as the work of Rounaq Jahan (1987) that studies women's role in politics, specifically examining their positions as political leaders in South Asia.

Conceptualizing women's participation in politics is certainly not an easy task and requires multidisciplinary approaches, combining perspectives from political science, gender theories, and public policy. Joakim Ekman and Erik Amna (2012) have demonstrated that the terms of political involvement and civic engagement are closely intertwined. Therefore, while evaluating the political participation of women, we must differentiate between direct formal political behaviors (positions in political institutions) and less direct types of participation, such as civic engagement and social involvement. Ferzana Bari (2005) explained that women have limitations in their ability to participate in politics. The prevalent pattern of

women's exclusion is the result of (a) social and political discourses, (b) political structures and institutions, and (c) socio-cultural and functional constraints that limit women's individual and collective agency. Therefore, women's participation in politics must be situated in a larger context, especially in the digital era, where the role of social media has increased as a new form of political sphere, creating what is usually called "digital activism". Julia Schuster (2013), for instance, highlights the new trend of young women's online activism as a part of feminist engagement in New Zealand. In social media platforms they usually express concerns and protests over government policies, especially regarding employment. This alternative form of political participation is usually used by minorities, including women, youth, migrants, since they are usually excluded from formal political engagement (Zani & Barrett, 2012).

In Indonesia, since the beginning of the reformation era in 1998, more and more Indonesian women have become involved in political activities. The efforts to protect women's rights have manifested themselves in various public policies, such as the issuance of Presidential Instruction Number 9 of 2000 concerning Gender Mainstreaming, which paved the way for the preparation of gender-responsive national policies, such as the formulation of the General Election Law of 2000, which regulates legislative seat quotas for women, and Law Number 13 of 2003 concerning Manpower, which regulates the protection of women's rights in the workplace. Everyone has an equal right

to participate in politics in a democracy, and nobody is left behind. Article 65, paragraph 1, of the Constitution No. 12 of 2003 mentions that at least 30% of parliament members must be women. This is part of a plan to get more women involved in politics, called "affirmative action." This affirmative action for the women's quota in the House of Representatives (DPR) makes it more likely that women will be able to take part in politics. In 2009, Indonesia's Central Bureau of Statistics began monitoring the gender equality index by referencing United Nations Development Program data indicators (UNDP).

In Indonesia, studies on women's political participation usually overlap with the concept of political representation. This is not surprising because countries which are still struggling with gender equality are usually still concerned with the number of women in political institutions, in specific government bodies. Edward Aspinall, Sally White, and Amalinda Savirani (2021), for instance, examine that while Indonesia has ruled a mandatory quota for women in parliament with the 2019 elections saw over 20 percent of women elected to the national parliament—the highest since Indonesia gained its independence, women in the country still experience structural and cultural barriers to achieve the promise of equal representation for both men and women. The country has experienced different system to improve women's political participation, including closed-list proportional representation (PR), open list PR, voluntary quota system, and

mandatory quota system in 2004 which required each political party to nominate at least 30 percent of women candidates—although this system receives criticism for its lack of non-compliance provisions. The significant achievement from the 2019 election quickly triggered responses from academics. Aspinall, White, and Savirani criticize the characteristics of the elected women and express concern over how they can contribute to the advancement of gender equality in the country. Quoting Wangnerud, they state that *"While women are taking their seats in legislatures in larger numbers than ever before, reflecting a rise in what is known as descriptive representation, the rise in women connected to political elites has raised questions about the extent to which these women will advance the interests of the women they represent, known as substantive representation"* (Aspinall et al., 2021).

Investigating the political participation of women cannot be isolated from the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Since the early 1990s, the worldwide NGO sector has expanded rapidly. The numbers are convincing. In 1996, a survey revealed 1 million NGOs operating in India and 2,100 in Brazil. In developing nations, the NGO sector has grown significantly (Edwards, 2000). Significant shifts in the conceptualization and application of governance and development are driving this expansion. Policymakers have abandoned their unthinking faith in the market's capacity to bring development and have adopted a worldview that places civil society at the center (Edwards & Gaventa, 2001).

Non-governmental organization (NGO) is an umbrella term for any non-governmental organization (NGO) that advocates for positive values such as democracy, empowerment, and participation. In the best cases, they express a fundamental shift in values and a critique of the unfulfilled aspirations of modernity without being postmodern. They can assist develop bridges between donors, governments, and communities and serve as the voice of the oppressed conscience in many nations (Stromquist, 2002). Streeten (1997) explained that NGOs are organizations with professional personnel whose mission is to contribute to the alleviation of human suffering and the development of underdeveloped nations. NGOs can help the poor, especially poor women, get organized and "empowered" through a combination of microcredit, raising awareness, training for group members, and other social services (Baccaro, 2001). NGOs play a crucial role in filling the gap that the government has left. NGOs assist individuals in their attempts to enhance their quality of life through raising human awareness, capacity, and competence. Ulleberg(2009) said that in many countries, the state has not yet completely fulfilled its developmental function. In recent years, development non-governmental organizations have assumed the role of primary service providers in public sectors such as health and education. Frequently replacing the government's function on the ground, particularly in isolated rural regions

Many non-governmental organizations use the word capacity

development when defining their operations or mission, or the comparable concepts of "capacity building," "creating an enabling environment," or "developing talents." Few, however, specify what they mean by the term or address its ramifications, as several donor organizations have lately attempted to do. However, when examining capacity challenges with regard to NGOs, there are three underlying characteristics that are more or less clearly stressed and worthy of mention. Capacity development is the process of bottom-up reform for organizational transformation, a change agent in the pursuit of sustainable development, and the promotion of a development strategy based on the ideals of ownership and participation (Ulleberg, 2009).

The NGOs movement is closely related with the activity of human empowerment. Empowerment is a process, a system via which individuals, groups, and communities gain control over their affairs. Consequently, the evident content of empowerment will vary across individuals, organizations, and contexts. Through empowerment, people can gain control over their social, political, economic, and mental lives by: 1) having access to information, knowledge, and skills; 2) making decisions; and 3) having a sense of self-efficacy, being involved in the community, and feeling in control (Rappaport, 1987; Rappaport & Zimmerman, 1988). The empowering product transcends the perceived world and enters the realm of solid reality. It is essential for the empowerment process that there be a sense of control and the

confidence to act effectively. However, the result of empowerment needs a real ability for successful action (MWS, 1990).

Lembaga Gemawan is one of the local NGOs in West Kalimantan that focuses on the political sovereignty of society, people's economic independence, character of local culture, ecological justice, and gender equality. In modern era the role of non governmental organizations is crucial to ensure the people empowerment especially regarding women participation in politics. This article explores the role of the NGO (Lembaga Gemawan) in promoting women's engagement in West Kalimantan's local politics. This article aims to answer the following questions: 1) To what extent do the roles of Lembaga Gamawan improve the participation of women in local politics? and 2) What are the challenges and opportunities for Lembaga Gemawan in conducting empowerment of women's participation in politics? Using a method called qualitative descriptive analysis, the results of this study indicate that the role of NGOs (Lembaga Gemawan) succeeded in mobilizing women in the community to build awareness and participate in political issues through empowering women.

RESEARCH METHOD

The article draws on qualitative research, by which the author focuses on the role of Lembaga Gemawan encouraging women political participation in West Kalimantan. Qualitative research is used to provide reports with complexity, a holistic perspective, word analysis, and

extensive detail (Creswell et al., 2007). The data was acquired through procedures that were interconnected, a literature review, and in-depth interviews. First, a literature review was undertaken by evaluating primary and secondary materials pertinent to the study's issue. The main sources were reports released by Lembaga Gemawan, whilst the secondary sources were academic publications such as books and journals, newspapers, and digital media such as websites or the internet (Ikbar, 2014). Second, in-depth interviews with the director of Lembaga Gemawan were conducted to collect primary data and update the concerns pertaining to women's political engagement. Before reaching a conclusion, the authors conducted a deductive analysis of the data about the structured questions asked of respondents during interviews. This research examines the function of Lembaga Gemawan in promoting political involvement among women in West Kalimantan.

We define the political participation of women in two ways. The first is women's widespread participation in observing occurrences and addressing political issues. Women's impression of politics as negative, unclear, and unwelcoming to women is a perception that must be altered and encouraged if they are to participate fully in the policy-making process that benefits women. The second criterion that we focus on is the active participation of women who are actively involved in practical politics, such as running for council seats, participating in elections at the village level, and being

active in political organizations that seek positions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Lembaga Gemawan's initiatives and strategies to promote women's political participation

The Gemawan Institute, a non-governmental organization devoted to the empowerment of women, good governance and the environment, is involved in a variety of measures to promote women's political engagement. For Gemawan, politics must be completely and genuinely understood as an awareness based on reasonable decisions. Lely Khainur, the director of the Gemawan Institute, said that to encourage women's participation in politics, there needs to be strategic steps taken both for those who want to run in the election and to increase women's understanding in general about the importance of political issues in daily life.

There are two strategies and initiatives carried out by Gemawan Institute as steps to increase women's political participation in politics, as follows:

Establishing empowered women's communities at the local level

Gemawan has put forward concerns over politics, political education, civic education, and election watch, in their programs since the early establishment of the organization in late 1990s. According to Lely, the Gemawan Institute recognized that politics of power still dominate the Indonesian political system, which has not yet progressed to politics of empowerment.

The public perception of politicians is that they are bad, corrupt, and manipulative. In contrast, she believes that politics is the most effective approach to change policies that influence people's lives, thus there should be a movement to change the general perception of politics through encouraging noble values.

The issue of women in politics then becomes an inseparable part of their activities, where they believe women are still subordinated and therefore, need to voice out their aspirations. Politics in general are more in favor of men's role and voice. Across the globe, women are also underrepresented in politics (Paxton et al., 2020). It is commonly believed that women serve only as domestic workers and companions for their husbands. Women's understanding of their rights as citizens is rarely brought up in public conversation, especially when discussing government policy.

"There are still a significant number of male politicians who look down on women. Men continue to predominate in the bureaucracy. The political system continues to accommodate women's representation with skepticism. The mass media continue to advocate less for women's political potential"(Gemawan, 2014).

As one of the strategic steps in making women mainstream in politics, Gemawan conducts various activities, one of which is creating a women's community association that aims to empower and improve the quality and capacity of women at the district level. Gemawan believes that the establishment of a women's community is an entry point to providing a forum

for women to exchange ideas and experiences in various scopes, such as socio-economics and women's issues. The formation of the women's community ultimately aims to provide political education to women so that they realize that politics, which they may have assumed to be far from their lives, is actually very close. Every aspect of life will eventually boil down to the level of government policy, and the most effective way to influence policy is through political channels. This change of perception needs to be encouraged through the empowering and awareness increasing activities conducted by Gemawan. Encouraging women to actively engage in organizations is also means to increase their organizational and leadership skills, two of important skills required to improve political participation. Gemawan has also developed a pilot project called *Sekolah Pemimpin Perempuan* (Women Leadership School) in Sambas and has planned to develop it further in other regions as well.

Many women's communities have been formed by Gemawan in various regions in West Kalimantan such as Mempawah Regency Women's Union (SPKM) (Roni Antoni, n.d.) and North Kayong Regency Women's Union (SETARA)(Maulissa, 2022). This activity aims to encourage the establishment of women's communities and organizations by helping them recognize their potential, providing an introduction to gender mainstreaming, and highlighting the role of women not only in the domestic area but also encouraging them to be more insightful in the social, educational, economic, and especially

political fields. This woman's community is not only a place for women to learn, but also a place where a strategic plan is made and the vision, mission, and budget for the next three years are discussed. The vision of this organization is to create advanced, united, sovereign, politically strong, and economically independent women, based on local wisdom, gender justice, and ecological justice. Lely said that the women who participate in union and organizations have demonstrated their confidence and are trusted with several strategic positions in accompanying the leaders of the villages or regency.

Organized a strategic course on winning women candidates at the provincial level

Gemawan focuses on debriefing efforts for female candidates from all parties in addition to creating groups and communities for women to learn about their rights as citizens. Every year before the legislative elections, Gemawan always holds legislative candidate review activities and also electoral district reviews. This activity aims to provide education for female legislative candidates who will compete in the elections, in order to have an insight into democracy, the functions and main duties of a council member, anti-money politics, and gender mainstreaming. Various gender issues are of concern, such as issues of domestic violence, human trafficking, etc.

In addition, it is important to encourage these women legislative candidates to have technical skills in winning votes, namely public speaking techniques, lobbying, and approaches to

constituents. For this reason, Lely said that female legislative candidates should know very well what issues are the focus in their electoral districts (*daerah pemilihan*). This is related to the relevant relationship between the candidate and the constituents who will be their potential voters later. Do not let these women candidates only become political commodities that are sold by political parties as sweeteners in every election but are not elected and have an impact on society, especially women.

Gemawan does more than just educate women interested in running for legislative office in order to encourage more women to participate in politics. Gemawan believes that in addition to education about the values fought for, there needs to be a commitment stated in an integrity pact document. This is an effort to bind promises and commitments for female candidates when elected to stay on the right track, not forget all the insights that have been given, and continue to fight for women's issues. Lely said that this is a moral movement without coercion. Each woman who had signed up to run for office was contacted and told about the political contract she would have to sign. This is a concrete form of commitment regarding the willingness to increase sensitivity and alignment on issues of gender injustice, gender-based violence, and human rights violations. In addition, they are also asked not to be involved in activities or organizations that commit human rights violations, support and encourage child protection, not corruption, encourage strict and fair law enforcement, and support and encourage policies to protect the sources

of life of the community and women sourced from nature. In the wake of the 2014 local election, 16 women candidates signed this pact in public (Hayat, 2014).

Problems and Challenges of Lembaga Gemawan empowering women participation in politics

As a non-governmental organization engaging in the issues of women empowerment, environment, and good governance, Gemawan has also encountered a number of challenges and obstacles while carrying out its vision and mission in West Kalimantan. Encouraging women's participation in politics is certainly not an easy and quick job; it requires a strong strategy and patience in changing the perception of the community, especially women, towards politics.

The first challenge Gemawan has to tackle in encouraging women's political participation is regarding the general perception of women towards politics (Gemawan, 2014). There has been a general view among women that politics is not a place for women. Many women think that political issues are too distant and not relatable to their lives—something that should only be addressed by government officials. This issue is in line with existing studies on women in the political arena that conclude that women are generally less interested and less knowledgeable than men about politics (Karp & Banducci, 2008). Women believed that they were already represented by the males in their families, including their dads, spouses, and brothers (Dolan; Deckman; Swers, 2021). They explain that historically, men and women had distinct social roles.

Men's contributions to society were mostly in the public realm, where they worked outside the house to support their families. In the private domain, women were responsible for administering the home, raising and educating children, and ensuring the spiritual and moral well-being of the family. Obviously, these "separate worlds" often applied disproportionately to white women of privilege, since enslaved women, free women of color, and lower class women frequently had to labor outside the house to support their families. This view has resulted in two ways: women's confidence low to compete with men in various fields, including politics, and women's perception of politics as a sideline issue.

This is an issue that Lely said Gemawan strives to address in several programs. They strive to change the mindset of women regarding politics by conveying mentoring and training programs, as part of education on politics. Using the educative approach is a good tactic since the materials are usually relevant to women's roles and needs. Lely said that Gemawan usually states to the participants of the women's empowerment training that if they run businesses in the market, it is not impossible for their sales to decline due to the market competition with bigger industries with huge capitals selling the same product category. Therefore, government intervention is required to protect the traders, especially small and medium enterprises. Issues like this will all boil down to the existence of relevant government policy, which means that it can only be influenced by the political process. A study by Goltz, Buche, and

Pathak (2015) confirms that women's entrepreneurship can flourish well in the presence of strong women's political leadership which influence the rule of law in the economic behaviors and market relations. This is what makes women realize the need for the community to fight for the interests of women in politics and public policy.

The second issue that needs to be addressed is the limited skills and capacities of women to involve in politics, such as public speaking, lobbying and negotiating, and influencing others. This issue is actually related to the first one, since not many women are willing to participate in upskilling and training programs because they do not feel the need to. In support of this argument, an article written by Fox and Lawless (2011) explain while the gender gap in electoral positions in the United States is believed to be the result of "skill gap", it is actually more of the perceptual differences that women believe they do not possess the same qualities and qualifications as men to seek office and engage in electoral politics.

The last, and perhaps most crucial challenge to increase women's political participation is related to the structural and cultural factors. Increasing women's political participation in the sense that women are actively involved in the policy-making process is inseparable from the challenge of changing the political system to one that is friendly to women. Women encounter challenges from the public and also to some extent, mass media, to prove themselves worthy of being actively involved in political activities. In addition, a political system

that is not facilitative of women's presence also affects how women can be involved as policymakers in government. Lely said that there are cases where political parties place several of their female legislative candidates in the same electoral district so that fellow women have to compete, and eventually only a handful of them are able to qualify for the parliament. As a result, sometimes the 30% quota for women's representation in the parliament is not met. She added that the existence of women's quota rules does not mean that it is something that is "taken for granted," because women still have to fight for their existence in order to fulfill quota. This is not a new phenomenon as it has been widely acknowledged that the state and governmental institutions are believed to be gendered institutions directed by the masculinist logic. Public policies and regulations aiming at improving gender equality, including the 30% quota for women in the Indonesian parliament, indeed have existed and have become a part of global gender mainstreaming program driven by the women's movement worldwide (Krook & Norris, 2014). However, it is also important to closely look at the seemingly gender-neutral political institutions that have gendered impacts—particularly benefiting men more than women.

The gendered characteristics usually exist in the entire political system, the legislatures, executives, taxation and also in the micro-level political settings, including the interaction between policymakers. A study by Vivien Lowndes (2020) explains in detail how the gendered

political institution can be observed in four variables: their rules about gender (what actions are deemed permitted, gender roles, affirmative action), rules with gendered effects (neutral policies that may have different impacts to women and men), gendered actors working with rules (the mindset and actions inhibited by rule-takers and rule-makers), and gendered outcomes of action shaped by rules. In Indonesia, in particular, the large geographical size and population enables the political system to be controlled by the oligarchy, making the cost to enter the office very expensive, especially for women who are systematically lacking access to financial resources (Lely, 2022). Therefore, improving women's political participation needs a change of the entire political system and the rules on which it operates.

Possible ways of improving women political participation in West Kalimantan

The challenges to improve the political participation of women discussed above are also accompanied by varying opportunities. According to Gemawan, there are a number of ways to encourage women's participation, particularly in politics. There are means to accomplish Gemawan's vision, despite the fact that changing the perspective of women's political participation is not an easy or quick task. Expanding the practice of political representation by boosting the nomination of female candidates and achieving an equitable public policy agenda are two approaches to encourage this. Lely stated that there has been a quite huge opportunity for women's political representation as a

result of a long fight against the male-dominated political system. West Kalimantan, especially, has recorded an achievement in terms of the number of women serving in the parliament. In many elections, women obtain more votes than men (Gemawan, n.d.). The achievement of campaign and advocacy to fight for the 30% quota for women in the parliament is an important starting point, but certainly not a final accomplishment. Ensuring substantive representation (making sure women's voices are heard and interests are facilitated, and eradicating gender-based power relations) is also met is a crucial step to take ahead.

To achieve this, women need to receive more political education since having women leaders who look out for the best interests of their people depends on their understanding of the subjects they are fighting for. Lely Khainur recommended that *"(Women politicians need to) Make pro-people policies and budget allocations that support the provision of quality public services. Establish relationships with base communities, civil society activists, journalists, professional organizations, and female public officials as part of attempts to communicate with constituents and monitor each other. Continue to create capability through continued communication and dialogue with competent parties."* She hoped that women who serve in government institutions are not satisfied with their positions per se, but are willing to serve the interests of other women they represent. She hoped that these women would engage more in public discussion and collaboration with civil society organizations (CSOs) to listen to the

aspirations of local communities. Other than that, collaboration with other stakeholders are also needed to improve knowledge and skills of women politicians regarding their role and functions in the political system.

The government, in addition to non-governmental groups, is a significant factor in promoting women's involvement in politics. The low degree of female political engagement is partly a result of the substantial political expenses that must be borne. The establishment of a gender-inclusive political environment and system is the responsibility of the government. Starting there, regulation to guarantee that women have the capital to participate actively needs to be taken. According to Arum (2022), any customary laws that degrade women should be abolished by the government. Lack of education poses a significant challenge to women's political engagement. They recommended that the government make all levels of education free, particularly for women. No one would have an excuse not to send their girls to school, she claimed, if this was done.

CONCLUSION

Women equality is one of democratic pillars that must be supported in politics. The presence of women in politics means that power and violence, which are predominantly carried out by men, are not the sole focus of political discourse. To obtain consensus in the formulation of public policy, women offer a strategy that stresses discourse and avoids conflict. The direct participation of women in

politics demonstrates that the state's democracy is on the correct path.

However, the reality on the ground does not always match with the concept of democracy. The low participation of women in politics can be viewed from two perspectives: the general attitude of women toward political concerns and their lack of interest in and capacity for practical politics. In order to reach maximal goals, it is crucial to fight for government regulations that issue affirmative policies in the form of a 30% quota of female candidates in political parties.

Therefore, NGOs exist as a venue to bridge the divide between women and politics. As a non-governmental organization, Gemawan Institute aims to change the perception of women who tend to be skeptical about politics, as well as the public assumption that female politicians cannot compete with males. With the goal of building a women's community that emphasizes the necessity of politics for women, Gemawan promotes women's awareness of the need to participate in politics.

In addition, Gemawan invites the commitment of prospective female candidates through several trainings before running in the election. In order for these female politicians to uphold the values for which they fought, notably for women's issues, even after holding important positions in government. In the end, non-governmental organizations, specifically Gemawan, play a crucial role in promoting women's political engagement.

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