

## CASE STUDY

West Java, Indonesia

# Improving indigenous women's access to land and participation in natural resource management

In Halimun Salak, West Java, Indonesia, Kasepuhan women were landless, and were excluded from land-related decision-making and natural resource management. The society is traditional, and is governed by strict customary law (*adat*) and practices. As a result of gender roles, women were confined to the house, and could not participate in community meetings. RMI worked with the Kasepuhan community to raise awareness about gender disparities and their effect on women, and to strengthen women's access to land and natural resources. As a result, Kasepuhan women are now part of women's organisations where they learn about their rights. They are participating in forest resource management and are cultivating previously underutilised land.

### PRINCIPAL ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

RMI (Rimbawan Muda Indonesia/Indonesian Institute for Forest & Environment)

### LOCATION

Mount Halimun- Salak National Park, Lebak District, Banten Province, West Java, Indonesia

### TIMELINE

2001-present

### TARGET AUDIENCE

Civil society, NGOs involved in women's land rights

### KEYWORDS

Women's land rights, indigenous peoples

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## GOOD PRACTICES

Towards making land governance more people-centred

This case study is part of the ILC's Database of Good Practices, an initiative that documents and systematises ILC members and partners' experience in promoting **people-centred land governance**, as defined in the Antigua Declaration of the ILC Assembly of Members. Further information at [www.landcoalition.org/what-we-do](http://www.landcoalition.org/what-we-do)

This case study supports people-centred land governance as it contributes to:

- Commitment 4** Ensure equal land rights for women
- Commitment 5** Respect and protect the inherent land and territorial rights of indigenous peoples
- Commitment 7** Ensure that processes of decision-making over land are inclusive

# Case description

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## Background issues

The Halimun Salak area has the largest remaining tropical rainforest ecosystem on the Island of Java. In an effort to protect the richness of this ecosystem, the Indonesian Government designated the Mount Halimun Salak National Park (MHSNP) as a conservation area. Established in 1992, the park comprises of two mountains, Mount Halimun and Mount Salak. The Southern part of the park is home to the Kasepuhan community, a Sundanese group of around 5,300 people who practice and observe customary law, or *adat*.

The Kasepuhan believe that their ancestors entrusted the Halimun Salak mountain range and forests to them, and should be passed down to their children. The Kasepuhan are highly dependent on these lands and forests; they farm rice for their sustenance. As such, protecting and maintaining the integrity of the area is essential to their livelihoods and traditions.

The declaration of the area as a part of Halimun Salak National Park in 2003 turned about 50% of the Kasepuhan territory into a special conservation zone. The park managers consider many community activities within the area illegal. Whilst customary land rights have been recognised by the Indonesian government since 2013, the designation of a conservation park pits customary land rights against statute based biodiversity conservation efforts. This puts the Kasepuhan people in a precarious situation, where they have no access to land, and cannot participate in the management of their natural resources.

Customary law allows the community to live on and cultivate their land. However, women are rarely involved in any decision making processes (e.g. what crops to grow).

Negotiations on land are traditionally entrusted to men in the community. Women are therefore faced by two challenges: seizure of their customary lands by the government, and lack of decision making power over their land.

## Solution

Since 2001, RMI has been working in the Kasepuhan community to engage underrepresented groups on issues of land and natural resource management, by encouraging collective action and better access to information. In doing so, RMI deals with gender issues on three interconnected levels:

### Community level

At community level, RMI ensures that programme design is participatory and includes men and women. Women are involved in the planning and implementation stages of any local project. Additionally, RMI gives workshops to women on natural resource management and negotiation skills.

### NGO level

RMI works with local NGOs to assist them to incorporate a more gender sensitive approach to their work. They have held gender trainings for their staff, community organisers and other NGOs since 1997. RMI has a unique strategy of partnering with and assisting other NGOs during project design stages; making sure that gender is mainstreamed into the development activities of the NGOs.

### Advocacy work

RMI is actively involved in forest policy advocacy, and is working towards incorporating gender justice in their advocacy work, policy papers and official speeches.

## Activities

RMI has been working with local communities in the Halimun Salak National Park since 2001. Their primary focus was women's education. They have expanded their work to delivering gender education to the whole community and gender mainstreaming at NGO and district level.

### Community level

#### Field school for women

Since 2001, RMI runs a field school for women in Kasepuhan. The field school runs a few times a year for groups of 20 to 40 women in different villages across the national park. The focus of the field school varies with each community and year, based on the group size and community needs. Overall, the field school educates women and girls in the community through "active learning" activities that are aimed at:

- Teaching women who did not finish formal primary education literacy skills;
- Teaching women about their rights as citizens;
- Encouraging critical thinking and awareness through open discussions;
- Teaching women sustainable farming techniques;
- Encouraging community participation;

- Encouraging women to participate in natural resource management;
- Building a support network that women can rely upon;
- Challenging traditional views of what Kasepuhan women can and cannot do;
- Encouraging discussions about gender roles, and highlighting some of their shortcomings.

### Weekly workshops

The workshops are organised weekly, and are hosted in the villages by local women or RMI volunteers. They are aimed at developing the capacities of local women by:

- Creating a network where women can socialise and learn from one another;
- Teaching women how to manage crops and about sustainable farming techniques;
- Encouraging women to cultivate underutilised land;
- Teaching women about sustainable foraging techniques, use of medicinal herbs, pond management and environmental conservation;
- Teaching women how to cook nutritious meals using fruit and vegetables grown in their own garden and in community managed gardens;
- Helping the community to address gender disparities by encouraging discussions about gender roles and their role in the marginalisation of women; and
- Encouraging knowledge sharing between women by hosting workshops.

### Nursery

RMI has aided the creation of a children's (0 to 6years) play group in Kasepuhan Cirompang. This nursery runs Monday to Saturday, and allows women to go out to the fields and attend meetings without having to worry about their children.

### NGO level

RMI has engaged with NGOs through the following channels:

#### Gender and natural resource management training

- Inviting NGOs, activists and community officials to attend RMI gender programmes and workshops;
- Hosting a training programme in collaboration with the Gender Studies Department at the University of Indonesia and the Women's Rights Commissioner, aimed at gathering feedback from grassroots and civil society groups on their use of Gender Evaluation Criteria (GEC) to evaluate the 2015 Land Bill;
- Encouraging gender mainstreaming by project designers and implementers.

### Joint proposals

- Partnering with local NGOs to develop joint project proposals and to ensure that gender is considered in the planning stages. RMI has worked towards gender justice, inclusivity and fairness to women in all development projects in the Kasepuhan region.

## Advocacy level

### Advocacy and campaigning

RMI advocates and campaigns for the inclusion of gender as a cross-cutting theme in all national policies. To achieve, this, RMI has:

- Created partnerships with governmental and non-governmental organisations working on gender related issues;
- Represented indigenous women in local and national policy making processes.

## Importance of the case for people-centred land governance

RMI's aims at giving a voice to women who were powerless and marginalised in their communities. Through their work, they show the importance of protecting women's land rights, their rights to access natural resources and their involvement in decision-making. RMI's work can be used as a model for implementing gender justice and inclusivity in traditional and indigenous communities.

RMI's work has also empowered women to challenge traditional patriarchal norms and gender roles, thus improving the general well-being of women. They succeeded in changing community perceptions on traditional roles of women, and emphasised their leadership and resource management potential.

# Changes

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## Baseline

The Kaspeuhan followed *adat* strictly, resulting in gender roles and the exclusion of women from decision-making processes. Women's duties include collecting fodder and water, farming, manging the home, cooking and child-carer. These duties occupied all their time, resulting in their exclusion from community development initiatives. As a result, women depended on their husbands for access to land and natural resources.

## Achievements

RMI's achievements in the area can be summarised as follows:

- At community level, women gained recognition in a traditional community that historically denied them their rights. They are now able to participate in community meetings and are involved in decision making;
- Women are now able to leave the village to attend community meetings. Previously, women could not leave their homes; but as RMI continued to work in the area, women's rights are increasingly being understood and women are able to travel to neighbouring villages for RMI meetings, and to the city to attend workshops and

trainings. Women are now able to negotiate with their husbands about some traditional practices; and

- Elite women are now able to work inside and outside the home. Previously, elite women were not allowed to work, outside or within their households, meaning that they were excluded from decision making processes that concerned their natural resources. As RMI continues to work in the Kasepuhan community, elite women are participating in community meetings and are aware of their rights.

# Lessons learned

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## Lessons for civil society

Women have valuable knowledge and leaderships skills that can be used in natural resource management and community development. As such, the community must provide them with opportunities to participate in community development initiatives.

Local communities, including women, should be involved in local development initiatives. Development cannot be left to external organisations working in the communities. Local communities are best placed to identify their community needs and priorities. As such, they must be involved in the design and implementation stages of community initiatives.

To better involve women in community initiative, communities must review gender roles and their impact on women. This may be a tedious process, but it is important for the inclusion of women in natural resource management, decision-making and for development in general. In the case of RMI, it took over 10 years for the community to allow women to participate in decision-making and natural resource management.

## Lessons for policy makers

Bottom-up approaches should be encouraged at community level. The inclusion of women in community decision-making processes is essential and must be encouraged as government policy. Local communities must be the drivers of change, and leaders in policy conversations, as such, the entirety of the community must be included.

## Challenges

The Kasepuhan tradition is inherently patriarchal and women have little decision-making power. Decision-making is generally a man's task, whilst women's tasks include taking care of children and the home. As such, it was challenging to get women to attend community meetings, in some cases in the city, and to be involved in decision-making processes. In some reported cases, their participation in community initiatives resulted in domestic abuse and stigmatisation.

The Kasepuhan village is distinct from other indigenous peoples in the area because they are stricter on women, and limit their freedom of movement. Other indigenous groups do not limit the freedom of movement of their women, but the women have no right to inherit or to own land.

Given the long history of traditional gender roles, women often think that it is not their place to take part in community workshops or meetings. It was a challenge to involve women in meetings about farming and forest management. RMI has been working on addressing this challenge by putting women in the lead as community organisers of women's meetings.

When the women began attending meetings and workshops, they seldom contributed to the dialogues. To allow women to feel comfortable in their new roles, RMI created women's groups where they had safe spaces to articulate their thoughts and priorities. RMI is working to include women in combined community meetings, and to include them in decision-making structures.

## Follow-up

RMI will continue to operate in the Halimun Salak National Park and facilitate the inclusion of women in decision-making structures within indigenous communities. At the moment, RMI is engaging the youth in an effort to promote gender equality values at an early age. In addition, RMI continues to engage with local NGOs to incorporate gender in land access and natural resource management.

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