



**MERCY  
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# **WOMEN AS AGENTS OF FLOOD RESILIENCE**

**CASE EXAMPLE FROM THE BRIGE  
INDONESIA PROGRAM: KUSMIYATI**



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## ABOUT BRIGE

Launched in 2015 through support from Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies (MACP), the Building Resilience through the Integration of Gender and Empowerment (**BRIGE**) Program aimed to strengthen Mercy Corps' capacity to respond to gender-specific vulnerabilities in the face of natural disasters and climate-related shocks and stresses. BRIGE tested approaches in three countries – **Niger, Nepal and Indonesia** – to serve as a source for wider learning on how to integrate gender and social inclusion into resilience programs.

In Indonesia, BRIGE partnered with the Zurich Flood Resilience Measurement Program to strengthen gender integration to improve resilience to flooding in Semarang City in Central Java.

# WOMEN INNOVATING TO BUILD FLOOD RESILIENCE IN INDONESIA

Mercy Corps' BRIGE program aimed to empower women as agents of resilience, thereby increasing the coping capacities of households and communities to manage the impact of natural disasters and climate-related shock and stresses.

Since 2017, BRIGE worked with communities in the flood-prone city of Semarang, Central Java to build their resilience to flooding. BRIGE recognized women's potential as agents of resilience and chose to work with PKK women's groups to build their capacity and realize this potential.

When discussing vulnerabilities, especially those of women, conversations around gender and resilience are typically embedded. Women are stereotypically portrayed as far more vulnerable in times of natural disasters than other community members. While this may be true in many instances, they are also powerful agents of transformation. In focusing on women as change agents, we came across Mrs. Kusmiyati.

In the community of Krobokan, Mrs. Kusmiyati has played a crucial role in actively organizing the local PKK (women's group) to improve the community's living standards. She leads PKK's main programs on health and education by providing assistance to vulnerable populations (e.g., through maternal health, toddler nutrition, etc.) and focusing on early childhood education. In addition to those activities, she has also invited an external donor to construct a library in Krobokan, thus allowing community members to make use of the materials and broaden their knowledge.

*“We are experiencing obstacles in large-scale waste processing, such as processing inorganic waste to produce sellable fertilizer, and industrial waste management.”*

**Mrs. Kusmiyati**  
Leader of local women's group





Aside from devoting herself to PKK programs, in 2002 Mrs. Kusmiyati founded a capital institution for the Local Community Self-Reliance Board<sup>1</sup>, Artha Kawula, which has been able to independently channel funds toward infrastructure development. These include house renovations, building latrines and the repair of drains. Artha Kawula also provides economic aid to the community by providing capital stimulus to small-scale businesses with annual growth.

<sup>1</sup> Known in Indonesia as BKM (Badan Keswadayaan Masyarakat).

Despite her efforts toward community empowerment, Mrs. Kusmiyati still feels that what she has done is not fully inclusive in terms of community development. A great deal of training material has been developed in Krobokan over the last couple of years. However, there is still a need for activities that involve community participation in environmental responsibility. Mrs. Kusmiyati explained that in the 1970s-80s, the district was known to be prone to flooding. Those days are now gone thanks to the help of pumps which adjust water flow. However, there still are initiatives to contribute to the



livelihoods of many people, including women, and she recognizes the importance of the organization in bringing the issue of scattered waste from households and community businesses that litter the area.

Mrs. Kusmiyati's observations on waste and its significant impact on the environment and social life rapidly became a primary focus of Mercy Corps' BRIGE programming, working to shape the community's understanding on these issues. Integrating a gender perspective to strengthen



Eco-brick training is one of the capacity building that initiates by PKK



Kusmiyati mentors women's from Krobokan in eco-brick training

PKK's capacity has contributed to this attitude change significantly. PKK now understands the importance of implementing initiatives to contribute to the livelihoods of many people, including women, and recognizes their importance as an organization in bringing about transformative change within their community.

PKK has become a significant actor due to its proximity to the community and its people; their long-standing assistance to vulnerable populations has shown progress and is supported by regular data collection. Previously focused on activities as prescribed by the government, PKK is now motivated to independently pursue opportunities to realize their own initiatives.



## WOMEN CATALYZING COMMUNITY CHANGE

Since 2017, the PKK has independently initiated the issue of communal solid waste management through waste sorting. As the organizer of this initiative, Mrs. Kusmiyati has worked to gather together the whole community, including youngsters, and identify external opportunities by building networks for the financing of activities.

The solid waste management plan was initiated as a preventive effort to reduce waste with a long-term goal of avoiding floods. Waste becomes a common contributor to flooding because it blocks drainage pathways during heavy rains. The community has been able to bypass this, however, by implementing better waste management. This is done through sorting inorganic waste to be used as handicraft and eco-brick material (as a replacement for cement and wood). Other effective forms of inorganic waste management include selling to waste collectors or the Resik Becik waste bank managed independently by a community member in Krobokan. As for organic waste, PKK is exploring possibilities toward making a compost system to be used as fertilizer on a household level.

“We are experiencing obstacles in large-scale waste processing, such as processing inorganic waste to produce sellable fertilizer and industrial waste management”, Mrs. Kusmiyati explains. She hopes that the private sector will support these efforts.





Enthusiasm from eco-brick training participant

# LEVERAGING NETWORKS FOR THE FUTURE

BRIGE has supported PKK in constructing networks and searching for opportunities for activity development. This includes the use of factual data on conditions of the community, which are periodically collected, to be used to legitimize proposals submitted to relevant external parties. Though such cooperation has occurred before, PKK is currently working to participate with external parties so that PKK no longer solely plays the role of a policy dissemination agency or an aid distribution organization. Now, PKK looks forward to taking their initiative to the next level to improve the lives of all those in the Krobokan community for years to come.





## CONTACT

DANIELLE DE KNOCKE VAN DER MEULEN

Director of Programs, Indonesia

[ddeknockevidm@id.mercycorps.org](mailto:ddeknockevidm@id.mercycorps.org)

EKO SETYO UTOMO Program Manager | BRIGE Indonesia

[eutomo@id.mercycorps.org](mailto:eutomo@id.mercycorps.org)

AUDREY ANDERSON

Technical Program Director|BRIGE

[auanderson@mercycorps.org](mailto:auanderson@mercycorps.org)

### About Mercy Corps

Mercy Corps is a leading global organization powered by the belief that a better world is possible. In disaster, in hardship, in more than 40 countries around the world, we partner to put bold solutions into action — helping people triumph over adversity and build stronger communities from within.

Now, and for the future.



45 SW Ankeny Street  
Portland, Oregon 97204  
888.842.0842  
[mercycorps.org](http://mercycorps.org)