

Sustainable Income Generation for the Stigmatized Elderly Trans People in Indonesia

Indonesia

Hood College

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Section I: Narrative

A. Project Goals:

To establish a self-sustaining income generation, a laundry business, for Forum Komunikasi Waria Indonesia (FKWI) in Jakarta, Indonesia, that provides employment opportunities for the elderly trans people who are socially and economically disadvantaged. Furthermore, the income generation from the laundry business is intended to expand the capacity of an existing non-profit, FKWI, in providing shelter and other socioeconomic assistance to the trans community.

B. Other Funding:

There was no additional funding contribution to this project other than funding from the Davis Project for Peace grant funding.

C. Idea Origination:

Media outlets, such as BBC and CNN Indonesia featured the shelter run by Forum Komunikasi Waria Indonesia (FKWI). Subsequently, I decided to reach out to Yulianus Rettablout, FKWI's leader, to work together on the Davis Project for Peace Grant project.

D. Why the Trans Community is Stigmatized?

Transgenderism is considered a social illness in Indonesian societies. The majority of Indonesian trans people are rejected by their own family. Thus, many of these trans people become runaways. They often runaway to bigger cities, including Jakarta. With very little educational attainment, subsequently, they have limited economic opportunity beyond sex work. As they grow older, they cannot sell their body in return for monetary compensation.

E. Why Jakarta as the host site?

I chose Jakarta, Indonesia, because I was born in the city; I spent about one-third of my life there. Jakarta is a megacity with a population over 10 million people. As the country's capital, Jakarta has been the number one destination for internal migration for economic opportunities, including the transgender people.

a) What Was It Like to Work in Jakarta, Indonesia?

It is not easy to do business in Indonesia in general to start with. It takes between 5 to 10 days to have the power company to upgrade the existing electricity box in the property, for instance. I had to manage the project between two time zones (Jakarta is 11 hours ahead D.C.).

F. Doubt and Uncertainty

Prior to the lockdown, I felt very optimistic that I would be able to finish the project in two or three weeks. I started to feel uncertain in July when the first COVID lockdown was implemented. The uncertainty intensified as the lockdown continued to get extended. I was concerned that I would have hard time finding people to do the work. I had to make sure that my project assistants implemented my project plan while at the same time caring for their own safety and abide by Indonesian government's lockdown regulations.

G. Communication Challenges

The most challenging communication issue I had to encounter during the project was to interpret the non-verbal communication when I had direct communication with the people in Indonesia. Like many countries in Asia, Indonesia falls in the category of indirect cultures even in a business setting. My project assistants and I had to be proactive in maintaining communication with the people contracted for services. I had to use my cultural competency to ensure successful delivery of the project's objectives.

H. My Definition of Peace

My definition of peace is relational where groups of people within a community coexist in a socially in a harmonious way, without or with very little conflict and violence. A peaceful environment means that people who live in it can live freely, without any fear of stigmatization, discrimination, or acts of violence between people and/or groups of people. Peace symbolizes unity in diversity (religion, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religion, and socio-economic background).

I. My Project's Contribution to Peace – Short-term

My project will contribute to providing a key element of exercising one's human freedom – access to employment, especially for the elderly transgender people who seek shelter and social assistance at the FKWI shelter. Furthermore, my project will contribute to providing revenue for FKWI to better self-sustain its ability in providing social assistance to its community. Having a self-sustaining revenue is very important for the non-profit organization because it significantly depends on donations from individuals or groups of people.

My Project Contribution to Peace – Long-term

When then non-profit finally has the ability to sustain and advance its financial ability to serve its members; FKWI and its members can be recognized as useful citizens in their community and in the country. That said, by empowering the trans people, my project contributes to a more peaceful society in a plural society of Jakarta, Indonesia.

a) The Changes Created by the Project

The most obvious change is the increase of confidence of the organization and its members. By having an established business, FKWI knows that they have a source of income that they can count on for the organization. For the elderly trans people, they have opportunities for dignified employment. Overall, the laundry business encourages them to be more optimistic about their existences in the society.

b) The Anticipated Future Changes

The anticipated changes that will continue in the future as a result of the project is the ability of the organization to provide more beds, food, and medicine in the shelter. Especially during the pandemic, the shelter has been over the capacity. Furthermore, should the business run well, FKWI would have the means to help the runaways elderly trans people to have national identification which allows them to access the free healthcare provided by the government.

J. How Does the Project and the Way I View the World?

The project has changed the way I view the world in many ways, particularly in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations. Gender equality (goal #5) is an important part in creating a sustainable development in a society. Full inclusion of the Indonesian transgender community is an integral part of Indonesia's success to achieve its Sustainable Development Goals.

K. Covid-19 Pandemic's Impact on the Project

Yes, my project was heavily impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

a) Describe the Impacts

Indonesia became the center of Covid-19 pandemic in Asia following the Eid Al-Fitr holidays that mark the end of Ramadan in May 2021. Due to the Covid surge in Indonesia, Jakarta was placed under emergency lockdown starting on July 3; the lockdown was extended every week up to August 23, 2021.

b) How Did I Advance My Goals Despite Challenges?

I managed the project remotely from the U.S. I used my strong networks in Jakarta to facilitate the delivery of many orders in a timely manner, at the same time exercising the government lockdown. My in-country project assistants and I worked diligently to ensure that we checked all the boxes on our to-do list until the grand opening of the laundry business despite the emergency lockdown.

My Advice to the Future Grantees

Make sure that you have a very strong network in the country your project will be executed, especially when you may have to manage the project remotely.

c) Implement the Project Remotely – Highlights and Challenges

The number one challenge is the potential of time delay on finishing the project. From the beginning of July, 2021 to end of August, 2021, the Indonesian government kept extending the lockdown every two weeks. It was imperative that I rely on the in-country project assistant for detailed information on what location was on a complete shut-down and what not. In my case, I learned that my project assistants were able to navigate the maze of roads to get to the property where laundry business is located.

The highlights would be my strong networking in Indonesia. My project assistants and I were able to work together very well from the beginning to the end of the project. FWKI and its members were also on board in supporting the success of the delivery of the project.

L. Personal Statement

“Improving the life and guaranteeing the freedom of the stigmatized and discriminated are important elements to peace-building in a society.” Marhaennia English

M. Personal Information

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Section II: Photographs



Photo 1: Site visit prior to renovation and installation



Photo 2: Laundry equipment installation



Photo 3: Laundry business training



Photo 4: Putting up sign prior to grand opening