



Female Empowerment through Art & Tech

A report by BOM (Birmingham Open media) for British Council Indonesia, with findings from research visit (November 2016)

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1. Background

This report was commissioned by British Council to assess the barriers and opportunities for women working in the creative industries in Indonesia, particularly with art and technology.

The research was carried out by BOM (Birmingham Open Media), UK during a research trip from 16 – 26 November 2016, by BOM Director Karen Newman and Head of Programme Louise Latter, along with artist and BOM Fellow Di Wiltshire.

The research focussed on current activity in Yogyakarta (Jogja), with complementary research in the capital city, Jakarta.

Consultation included:

- Public workshops at Digital Design Weekend, Jakarta, gaining insights into societal attitudes and pressures (feedback from 232 participants)
- Discussions with people working within the creative industries (58 individuals)
- Discussions with two urban women's focus groups (14 people)
- Artist Di Wiltshire 'Sentiment' live art experiment to compare women's aural responses to questions with their EDA data (8 participants)

The research acts as a scoping project from which to assess potential future collaborations between BOM (Birmingham, UK) and Lifepatch (Yogyakarta, Indonesia). As two unique hub models, BOM and Lifepatch specialise in social impact through experimental interventions at the intersection of art, technology and science. They are both collaborative models who work through partnerships to build sustainable practice, and are both at a turning point in their development, planning to re-define their hub models.

2. Research Methods

Consultation took place across a range of groups including artists, activists and professionals working in the field of the creative industries, local urban women's groups and members of the public. This allowed for comparisons of attitudes to understand where societal pressures arise from and how best to target structured support for women aspiring to work with creative tech.

This was complemented by wider literary research including articles by Hivos, investigating Women and Sharia Law in Indonesia and various news and blogs such as Jakarta Post, Aljazeera and girlsnotbrides.org. The research also considered existing female empowerment programmes in Indonesia such as Hivos' ongoing projects, MAMPU, Bersama Project, Lifepatch's Nenek programme and Google's Women's Will.

3. Creative Industries



We met and consulted with 58 people from the creative industries in Jakarta and Jogja. This included 38 professionals from:

- Lifepatch
- Hivos
- IVAA (Indonesia Visual Arts Archive)
- Kunci Visual Studies Center
- Cemeti Art House
- ACEHouse Collective
- Mes56 Collective
- Betina Collective
- Volcanic Winds
- Lawe Lurik Weavers
- Terre Agustina (artist)
- Tamara Pertamina (artist)
- Mulyana (artist)
- Sparky and Bear homeschool
- British Council Indonesia
- Jakarta Biennale
- Yogyakarta Biennale

We also consulted with a further 20 creative industries professionals at Digital Design Weekend in Jakarta.

We asked women a series of open questions on postcards such as “what are the barriers to getting work in the creative industries?” Key issues identified included societal pressures for women, inability to access funding, opportunities and career progression, lack of support for emerging practitioners and no access to technical skills.

Societal Pressures

Traditional family values impact on many women’s choice to progress a career after marrying and having children. There has also been a sharp rise in Islamic fundamentalism in Indonesia in recent years (see next section – understanding societal pressures for women).

Often artists marry other artists; however we heard that even in this case female artists often lead on family life while men develop their career. Self-organised groups

such as Betina Collective and a programme run by Terre Agustina have developed in response to this problem, and encourage women to keep making work as artists after having children by offering moral support, collaborative opportunities and informal childcare.

Women's Health

Many women rely on free health care, access to which can take a long time, and contraceptives and pap smear tests for cervical cancer can be difficult to obtain for younger women out of wedlock (Hivos). From discussions with women at the Digital Design Weekend, we heard that women often prioritise the cost of their children's education over private healthcare. There has been a rise in breast cancer and maternal deaths in recent years.

Low Perception of the Creative Industries

Feedback suggests there appears to be a low perception of the value of the creative industries in Indonesia. This is important, as 'success' came up as a common answer to several other questions, including "what do you hope for your children?" and "what makes you happy?" Many respondents to "What makes you happy?" answered "making my parents happy". If the creative industries are not valued as a successful career choice by parents, this may affect young people's desire to develop careers in the sector.

Creative Hubs



There is a strong support system for women from the existing creative hubs. These hubs tend to form around a group of friends with similar interests, and either occupy a physical domestic space (such as Lifepatch, ACEHouse, Mes56, Terre Agustina) or exist over social networks (e.g. Betina Collective, Tika and the Dissidents). This is a unique strength of Indonesian creative hubs and allows a deeper connection to space and network through peer-to-peer support and learning. It also allows a dynamic and welcoming space for visitors, though not all spaces prioritise public engagement and this could be strengthened to increase tourism and raise perceptions of the creative industries.

Digital Skills

Feedback from practitioners highlighted a lack of access to digital skills. Digital media is still used to promote and document rather than create. There are several reasons for this:

- There are few artists working with art and tech, therefore there are limited reference points
- There are no strong examples of female-led approaches to art and tech, which often starts with a question rather than the tech
- Creative tech is not yet taught through traditional arts education
- There are no dedicated digital skills programmes for artists
- Artists who do have digital skills are limited in capacity to share them

Hivos also highlighted a difficulty in accessing technical skills. Additionally, there is a stigma that 'tech is for men' which can be off-putting for women.

Funding

Research highlighted difficulty in accessing funding. There is no public-grant making body or Arts Council equivalent. There are a few grant-making organisations such as Ford Foundation, but individual artists and collectives often struggle to access these. Artists and collectives need support not only to align their work with funding priority agendas and gain a better understanding of their impact against potential investment, but also to develop key administrative and grant-making skills. There seems to be no dedicated funding for emerging practitioners.

Potential of New Practice

We identified several promising practitioners with potential to create new powerful work using creative technology through activism.

There is scope to develop important work around disability in Indonesia, as well as arts and health. Lifepatch have already established in-roads with local women's groups and bio-processes related to cooking. Projects with creative tech could add potential value to women's lives, addressing everyday challenges.

There are also myriad possibilities for creative projects linking to Indonesia's textile and manufacturing industries, including wearable tech. These are all starting points from which to consider a programme of activity in the next phase.



4. Public Consultation: Understanding Societal Pressures for Women



Socio-Political Context Affecting Female Practitioners

To understand more about the societal pressures that may affect women's ability to progress in the creative industries, we captured the feedback of 232 members of the public during Digital Design Weekend in Jakarta and 14 women taking part across two workshops in Yogyakarta:

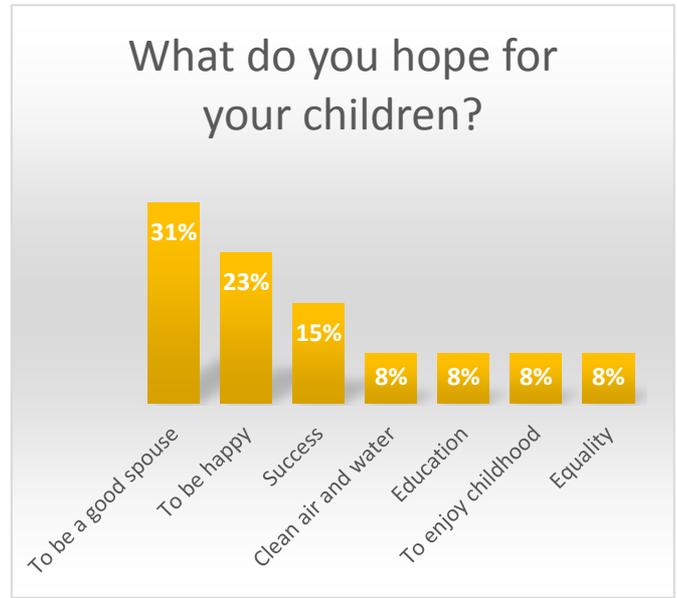
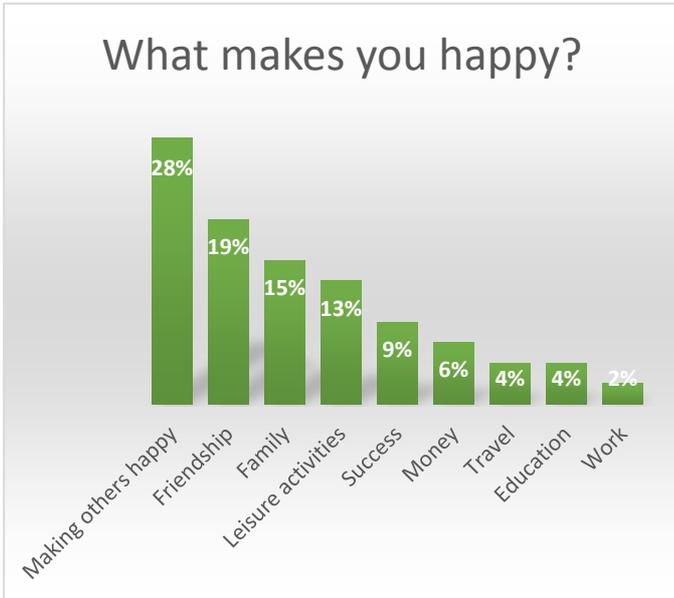
- Petukangan River women's community
- Kota women's community surrounding Lifepatch

Data was gathered using 25 open questions on postcards, on which the public were invited to choose and respond to any they felt strongly about with whatever answered they wished. Questions were deliberately open ended not to restrict responses and included things like:

- What makes you happy?
- What worries you?
- What do you hope for your children?
- What are the barriers to being healthy?

We gathered feedback from both female and male participants as well as children and young people to consider perspectives from different angles. Answers were then grouped together into categories.

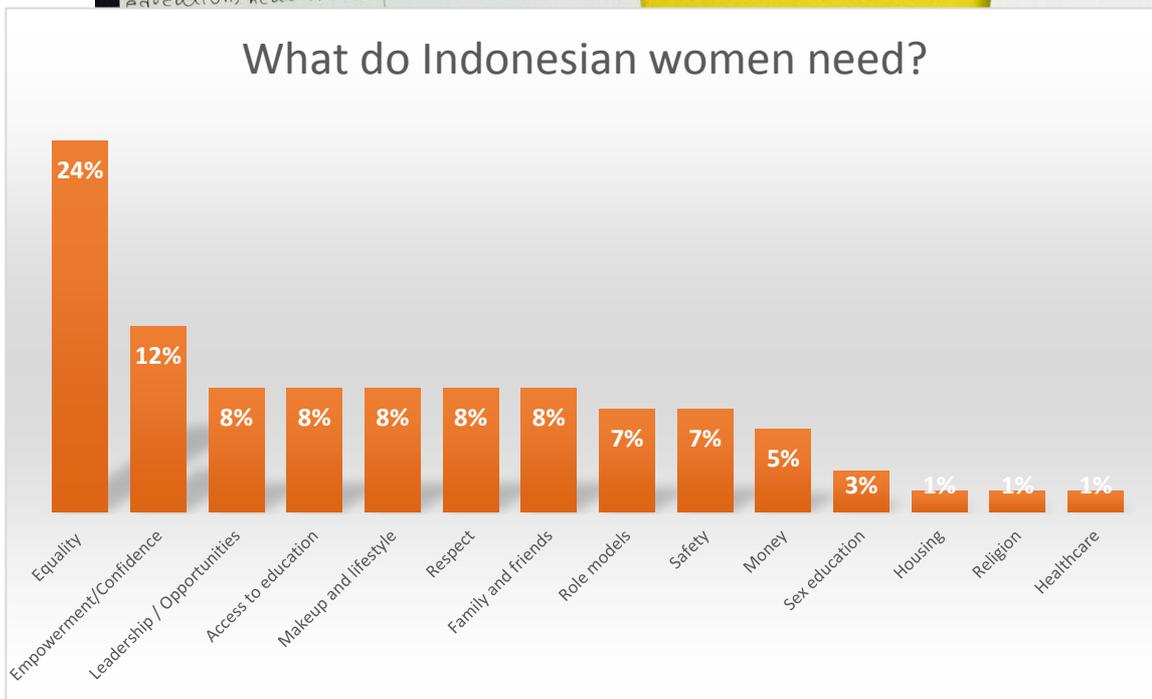
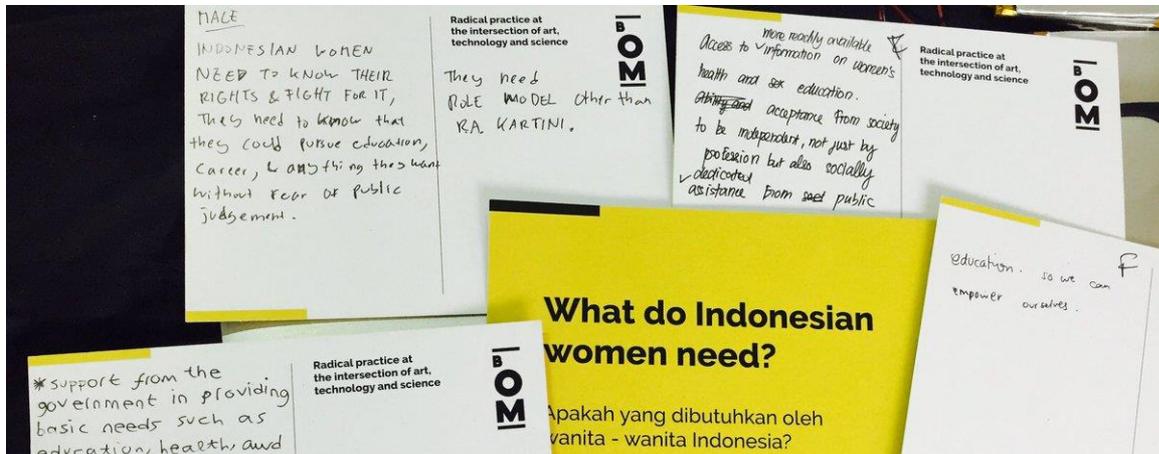
Answers highlighted strong family values with many prioritising marriage and making parents happy over education and work.



We also asked “what do you hope for your children?” which showed a strong preference for children to grow up into happy marriages or be a responsible spouse. Education, clean air and water and equality were valued least.



The question “What do Indonesian women need?” was asked to both male and female participants. “Equality” was the most common answer from 1/3 of participants. 1/4 participants answered “confidence” or “empowerment”. Opportunities and leadership positions came out at 8%, on a par with education.



Also on a par at 8% was respect, family and friends and makeup (the latter often chosen by young female participants). Healthcare was not considered as important for women and young female participants. This is interesting as parental ill health was the top concern for many children and young people who answered the question “what worries you?”



To understand societal pressures in Indonesia more fully we must consider the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in recent years.

Aljazeera news reports that “since 1999, national and local governments have passed 342 discriminatory regulations, including 79 local laws requiring women to wear the hijab. Although the number of the discriminatory local laws has doubled, from 154 in 2009 to 334 in 2013, in July 2013 the Ministry of Home Affairs [said](#) it would revoke only eight of them” whilst Islamic Activists have spearheaded these calls for laws and regulations that limit women’s rights.

At a policy level, Hivos have delivered important projects around female empowerment which are not specific to the creative industries but would offer a great partnership from which to build programmes with impact. Their previous projects range from a feminist school for young people to ongoing partnership with Komunitas Salihara to ensure 30% of women participate in culture.

Hivos also run an ongoing global programme in 'Strengthening Activists' Leadership and Advocacy Skills'.

Connecting Female-led Practice with Local Women's Communities



The workshops in Yogyakarta were delivered by Lifepatch exploring fermented tea and yogurt making. Lifepatch pitched these subjects as from previous experience they relate to women's interests in cooking and domestic life. They provided an interesting blur between Lifepatch's biohacking interests and those of the women, and could offer a good way of engaging women who may not otherwise participate in art and culture.



Lifepatch have a unique relationship with their neighbouring community, where children are allowed to enter the space at their will to make and learn with electronics, and neighbours have keys to use Lifepatch's computers for homework if needed. Lifepatch members also take part in a neighbourhood watch scheme each day where neighbours look out for one another. Lifepatch's positive contribution to the neighbourhood has fostered a positive perception within the local community. This is a great model to learn from, whilst thinking of how to support local LGBT artist communities in Indonesia who may be literally excluded from their neighbourhood due to their sexuality.

Lifepatch also helped artist Di Wiltshire fix electronic components in her wearable tech. Lifepatch's approach and facilities would make them excellent collaborators for female artists wishing to develop knowledge and practice with creative tech.



5. Summary of Key Findings

The research highlighted a number of key factors that may affect women's ability to find work and progress in the creative industries, particularly in the field of art and tech. Key findings are summarised below:

1. Creative practitioners have limited access to digital skills
2. Many female practitioners do not understand the creative potential of digital media (education does not prepare them and there are few strong female-led reference points)
3. There is demand, but little specialist support, for emerging new media producers / curators
4. There are strong existing conditions for growth – including peer-led 'hub' models that foster interdisciplinary working and support for working parents
5. There is strong potential for social impact through creative activism / female empowerment projects exploring
 - Equality and freedom of expression
 - Female role models
 - Safety in public spaces / transport
 - Arts and health
 - Textiles / wearable tech
 - Experimental games
 - Enhancing education
 - LGBT culture

6. Recommendations from Key Findings

We propose to address the key findings above through a phased approach over five years, with a series of skills development, partnerships, new collaborations and opportunities.

Growing new practices is not a quick fix. It will take time to invest in key individuals, to inspire and support the development of new programmes and opportunities for internationally ambitious new work. BOM is committed and excited about supporting this mission; however, we need to ensure that programmes are self-sustaining beyond our involvement. Partnerships will be critical to achieve this.

Our three phased approach is as follows:

- 1. Upskill several key practitioners with new skills (digital, creative, production and curatorial)**
- 2. Establish a new regular creative coding programme in Jogja, focussed on digital and creative skills development**
- 3. Develop a new programme of collaborations and opportunities that connects with international female-led practice. This will create a new network of practice that re-defines the notion of 'hub'**

Digital Skills

Coding skills access is very limited. Lifepatch have the most ready set up for artists to access, however their coding skills have developed through programming languages appropriate to Lifepatch's project interests. Current languages include HTML, Java, MaxMSP and Pure Data.

Lifepatch are very collaborative and want to support others, yet their capacity is increasingly limited due to rising demand for their work at national and international levels (there are only two coders within the Lifepatch collective, who are often unavailable due to touring and development).

There doesn't appear to be a skills base for games design and development. There is a growing uptake of experimental games in the work of strong international female-led practice, such as Jane Gauntlett, Di Wiltshire, Cao Fei etc. Experimental games can be a powerful way to explore challenging subjects. Games design is often appealing to female practitioners as it is driven by narrative and process, and guided by questions, rather than driven by the tech. We need to support development of key digital skills in this area (such as Twine, for interactive fiction, processing for interactive art, or GameMaker for more ambitious computer games) to inspire new projects.

Supporting Lifepatch's growth and building capacity to engage young female practitioners through this project should be key. If we are to stimulate further interest in creative tech practices for Indonesian artists, there will be greater demand for digital skills from emerging artists. Lifepatch need to build the creative coding

capacity within the collective, but also develop managerial and production skills around themselves to enable them to flourish financially and creatively – and enable the next generation of new media producers and curators.

Producer Skills

There is global demand for specialist new media producer roles, as acknowledged by FACT, Pervasive Media Studio and BOM as well as the British Council at Arts Collaboration and Exchange event at the Bluecoat, Liverpool September 2016. By focussing on the development of new female producers in the early stages, we hope to increase confidence and experience that will lead to them delivering several new programmes back in Jogja. We will continue to work with these producers to build new collaborative programmes between Birmingham and Jogja, as well as other international partnerships, that will redefine what a hub can be.

Desired Outcomes

- An increase in the number of female creative practitioners working with creative technology in Indonesia
- Increase in the quality of work using creative technology in Indonesia, with innovative female-led approaches to design
- Positive social impact through creative activism projects using technology to creatively address a number of key challenges facing women in Indonesia
- Develop sustainable new arts practices with international links and collaborations
- Help to develop Lifepatch's creative enterprise by boosting producer skills and capacity to meet creative industries needs