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Massey University

**WOMEN AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN
INDONESIA: A CASE STUDY OF ENGENDERING
LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN NORTH SUMATRA**

ASIMA YANTY SYLVANIA SIAHAAN

2004



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This is to certify that the research carried out for my Doctoral thesis entitled "Women and Local Governance in Indonesia: Case Study of Engendering Local Governance in North Sumatra" in the School of People Environment and Planning, Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand is my own work and that the thesis material has not been used in part or in whole for any other qualification.

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**WOMEN AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN
INDONESIA: A CASE STUDY OF ENGENDERING
LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN NORTH SUMATRA**

A thesis presented in fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
Development Studies at Massey University,
Palmerston North, New Zealand

ASIMA YANTY SYLVANIA SIAHAAN

2004

Abstract

The main purpose of this thesis is to explore the complexities involved in engendering local governance and to identify strategies to encourage gender equitable partnerships between stakeholders in local governance in Third World countries. Local governance refers to the dynamic yet complicated process of interaction between state and non-state actors involved in local level development processes. Considering the invisibility of women in local governance, this study focuses heavily on women's agency, that is, the way women redefine and reconstruct identities and interactions in engendering local governance despite the given constraints. The central argument in this thesis is that engendering local governance requires transformation of structures and processes of governing at the local level so that they recognise and are responsive to differences between men and women in their values and responsibilities. Relevant institutions should then integrate these differences in policies and in managing development at the local level.

Fieldwork in North Sumatra, Indonesia highlighted how the interlocking of public and private patriarchy complicates the engendering of local governance. Both within and beyond the household there are constraints put on women that impede their participation in local governance. Analysis of case studies of *perwiridan* (Moslem women's religious grouping), SPI (Serikat Perempuan Independen/ Union of Independent Women) and women working in local government found that relationships at the household level significantly influence gender relations in local governance. Reproduction of images of 'good' and 'bad' women is one of the most effective instruments to subordinate and control women in North Sumatra, meaning that it is not easy for women to formulate and defend their personal interests. Women often experience severe threats of physical, psychological and verbal violence when they attempt to influence formal decision making at the local level. Based on a further case study of the implementation of decentralisation, this study also found that decentralisation does not automatically bring local government closer to women due to the interweaving of structural, cultural, and financial barriers local government faces in implementing gender mainstreaming policies in North Sumatra. The intertwining of gendered structures of local government and gendered construction of the community contribute to the marginality of women in service delivery and in public decision making at the local level.

This study rejects the assumption that women are passive recipients in local governance since they contribute significantly in fulfilling household and community needs and interests. Through knowledge and understanding to construction of power at the local level, women creatively produce and use alternative strategies which are based on their sexuality and traditional gender roles in challenging and transforming gender inequity at the local level and in improving the quality of everyday life. By raising women's self esteem, confidence and solidarity in reconstructing gendered relations at the household and community levels, women's grassroots organisations open up alternative arenas for political expression for women which is crucial for the realisation of good local governance.

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GLOSSARY

Adat = Customary law and tradition

Anggota RT = Registered household head residing in an RT

APBD (Anggaran Pendapatan dan Belanja Daerah) = Regional Government Budget

APBN (Anggaran Pendapatan dan Belanja Negara) = National Government Budget

Arisan lingkungan = Neighbourhood self rotating credit scheme

Balai desa = Community meeting hall

BAPPEDA (*Badan Perencana Pembangunan Daerah*) = Regional Development Planning Board

BAPPENAS (*Badan Perencana Pembangunan Nasional*) = National Development Planning Board

Becak = Thrisaw

Bilal = One who summons the faithful to prayer

Biro Pemberdayaan Perempuan = Women's Empowerment Bureau/WEB

Bu Camat = Wife of head of sub-district

Bu Lurah = Wife of sub-ward head

Bu Kepala Desa = Wife of village head/chief

Bumbu = food's spices

BPD (*Badan Perwakilan Desa*) = Village Representative Body (VRB)

Camat = Head of sub-district

Desa = Village/ administrative rural region that includes several hamlets

Dharma Wanita = Civil Service Bureaucracy Women's Auxiliary

Dibawah ketiak istri = Under wife's armpit. It is used to describe men who are under his wife's control

DPR (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat*) = People's Representative Council

DPRD (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah*) = Regional House of Representatives

DIPDA (*Daftar Isian Proyek Daerah*) = Regional Development Project List

Forum BPD Perempuan Deli Serdang = Forum for female VRB members in Deli Serdang

GBHN (*Garis Besar Haluan Negara*) = Broad Outline of State Policy

GSI (*Gerakan Sayang Ibu*) = Love the Mother Movement

GERWANI (*Gerakan Wanita Indonesia*) = Indonesian Communist Party's Women's Auxiliary

GNOTA (*Gerakan Nasional Orang Tua Asuh*) = Foster Parents' National Movement

Golkar (*Golongan Karya*) = Functional Party

Gotong royong = Practices of mutual cooperation

Gusti = Master

Hadis/hadith = Sayings and stories concerning the life of Muhammad which have been validated and codified by Islamic scholars

Halus = Refined, cultured

HAPSARI (*Harapan Perempuan Sukasari*) = the Hope of Sukasari Women

Ibu = Mother or married woman; polite form of address to woman in higher position

Ibu rumah tangga = Housewife

Infaq = (voluntary donations which are usually given to the poor, orphans and widows)

Inpres (*Instruksi Presiden*) = Presidential Instruction

Jaring Pengaman Sosial/JPS = Social Safety Net

Jilbab = Moslem women's dress

JOIPARA (*Jaringan Organisasi Independen Pembela Rakyat*) = Network of Independent Organisations of the Defender of the People

Kabupaten = District

Kader = Cadre/head of a ward's assistants

Kartu Tanda Penduduk = Identity card

Kasar = Rough, rude

Kawula = People/servant

Kecamatan = Sub-district or ward

Kelurahan = Village/ administrative urban region that includes several hamlets

Kepala Lingkungan = Neighbourhood chief/ Head of hamlet

KB (*Keluarga Berencana*) = Family Planning Program

Kecamatan = sub district

Kelompok Pelaksana PKK = Implementation group of PKK

Kelompok remaja = Youth Section (one of functional sections of RK)
Kepala desa = Head of desa (rural village)
Kepala lingkungan = head of a ward
kerja bakti (voluntary work in mutual cooperation)
Ketua Umum = chief/head/CEO
Ketua RT = Chief of RT
Keyboard porno = Vulgar keyboard
Kodrat = Natural talents
Kodrat and martabat = Natural talents and proclivities
Mitra sejajar = Harmonious gender partnership
Peran ganda = Women's dual role
KORAMIL (Komando Rayon Militer) = Local military command
KORPRI (*Korps Pegawai Republik Indonesia*) = Indonesian Civil Servant Corp)
Kota = Municipalities
Kualat = Doomed
Ladang = Dry field
Propeda (Program Pembangunan Daerah) = Regional Development Program
Propenas (Program Pembangunan Nasional) = National Development Program
LKMD (Lembaga Ketahanan Masyarakat Desa) = Institution for the Defence of Village Society
LPJ (Lembar Pertanggung Jawaban) = Accountability report of head of local government
Lurah = Head of urban locality
Madrasah = Islamic school which offers secular as well as religious subject
Malu = Shy
Mandor = Head of workers
Mbak = Older sister; Javanese word to address older sister and older woman
MPR (*Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat*) = People's Consultative Assembly
MenUPW (*Menteri Urusan Peranan Wanita*) = Office of the Minister of State for the Role of Women

MNPP (Menteri Negara Pemberdayaan Perempuan) = State Ministry of Women's Empowerment

Menokohi suami = Fooling husband

Minta ijin = Ask for permission

Musyawarah = searching for consensus through compromise and syntheses

Otonomi daerah = Regional autonomy

PAD (Pendapatan Asli Daerah) = Local revenue

Panca Dharma Wanita = Five Women's Obligations

Pancasila = Five Principles of Indonesian State Philosophy

Pantun = a rhyming, four line stanza that is sung

PMD (Pemberdayaan Masyarakat Desa) = Village Community Empowerment

Peran ganda = Multiple role

Perempuan baik = Good women

Perempuan nakal = Bad women

Perwiridan = Moslem women's religious grouping

Pertemuan Akbar Perempuan Pedesaan = Great Meeting of Rural Women

PKI (Partai Komunis Indonesia) = Indonesian Communist Party

PKK (Pembinaan/Pemberdayaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga) = Family Welfare Development Program

POSYANDU (Pos Pelayanan Terpadu) = Integrated Health Service clinic

PROPENAS (Program Pembangunan Nasional) = National Development Plan

PROPEDA (Program Pembangunan Daerah) = Regional Development Plan

PSW (*Pusat Studi Wanita*) = Women Studies Centre

PUSKESMAS = Public primary health care centre

Qur'an = the Moslem holy scripture

Remaja mesjid = Moslem youth group

Repelita (Rencana Pembangunan Lima Tahun) = Five Year Development Plan

RT (Rukun tetangga) = Neighborhood association

RK = North Sumatra municipal government unit; must be divided into smaller RT units

Sambel = Chilli sauce

Sawah = wet-rice field

Sembako (**sembilan bahan pokok**) = Nine basic necessities

Semiloka = Combined seminar and workshop

Sekretaris Daerah = Regional secretary

STM (*Serikat Tolong Menolong*) = Neighborhood associations

Silaturahmi = Psychological bond

Syariah = Islamic law

SPI (*Serikat Perempuan Independen*) = Independent Women's Union

Takut = fear

Tokoh adat = Customary leaders

Tokoh agama = Religious leader

TPP2W (*Tim Pengelola Program Peningkatan Peran Wanita dalam Pembangunan Daerah*) = Management Team for the Enhancement of Women's Role at the Local Level

Undang-undang = Laws

Ustad = A person who teaches Islamic principles

Warung = Small stall where food, groceries and other goods are sold

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The problems and challenges facing humanity are global but occur and have to be dealt with at the local level. Women have the equal right to freedom from poverty, discrimination, environmental degradation and insecurity. To fight these problems and to meet the challenges of sustainable human development, it is crucial that women be empowered and involved in local government as decision-makers, planners and managers (Article 9: IULA Worldwide Declaration on Women in Local Government, 1998).

Background to the Research Programme

In recent years, there has been growing interest in the role of gender in governance as well as increasing concern about the marginalisation of women in public decisionmaking. In relation to good governance it is said that 'gender equality and social inclusion must go hand-in-hand with local democracy and participation and that these goals are mutually reinforcing' (UNESCAP, 2000:30). Therefore engendering local governance is a vital component in achieving good governance, and ways to bring this about deserves to be explored as it is a critical development issue.

This study focuses on gender aspects of one level of governance – namely, governance at the level of local communities in North Sumatra, Indonesia. The reason for choosing this focus lies in the urgency of bringing gender to the forefront in discussions on local governance and development since it is at this level of governance that the majority of grassroots women interact with government. Another more important consideration in discussing local governance from a gender perspective is that it enables women to emerge as active citizens who, through their daily activities and strategies, continuously reshape structures and processes surrounding them in their struggle for a more equal and just redistribution of development resources.

The main objective of this research is to explore the interaction between women, community organisations and local government and the complexities of incorporating a gender perspective in local governance. Local governance is about a dynamic and complicated process of interaction between state and nonstate actors involved in the

local level development process. Engendering local governance requires an interactive process of governing in which women, community organisations and local government may all contribute. Focusing merely on an analysis of local government institutions, on women working within local government or on women's organisations as separate entities is inadequate to examine the engendering of local governance. Rather, it is essential to consider the various structures and actors involved in governance and their interaction rather than looking only at local government institutions. A study which focuses on the interaction between women, community organisations and local government, and their strategies in managing and organising their relationships may then contribute to providing theoretical and empirical insights to the realm of engendering local governance.

Thus, the concept of governance rather than the concept of government will provide a suitable framework for exploring gender issues in the development process at the local level. Whereas the concept of government perceives governing as a one-way, top-down process in which government institutions and agents are the power holders, the concept of governance views governing as the outcome of the integration of various capacities of local stakeholders in managing their relationships and in influencing processes at the local level. In other words, the governance concept has shifted governing as the management of the society into management by and with the society, which provides a space for the emergence of women as one of the various stakeholders at the local level. This will thus extend the discussion of gender in local governance beyond the realm of women's involvement in local government.

When discussing the gendered nature of the state, feminist theory will be drawn upon. This study is based primarily on a gender perspective which recognises the existence of power relations between women and men as stakeholders in local governance in engendering local governance.

The neglect of a gender perspective in local governance

The UN and international donor agencies consider gender as one of the most critical development issues that needs to be explored. The UNDP report on women's political participation stresses the urgency of addressing gender equity in governance in order to achieve equal opportunities and voice for women and men in all spheres (Banerjee and Oquist, 2000:2). It states that the invisibility of women in governance contributes to the neglect of gender-sensitive policies which preserves gender inequity in households in the way that women's needs, for example with regard to their health and security, become marginalised. This means that gender balance and gender equity should be promoted for good governance to occur at all levels of governance-household, local and national.

Despite the reality that women actively contribute to community development, policy makers and planners at the local level often fail to recognise women's specific needs and fail to consult them or to address their problems (Moser, 1989; Beal, 1997). Both women's contributions and specific needs and interests in local governance may easily disappear under the umbrella of 'the community'. The gendered dynamics of local government structures and the culture of male domination in local government (Halford, 1992) provide explanations for the invisibility of both women's contributions and specific needs. The neglect of women and women's issues discourages women from getting involved in local governance which then entrenches their invisibility in it.

Additionally, the constructions of gender in society put some constraints on women participating in local governance. Women's involvement in community is determined by the society's norms and values concerning women's proper obligations and roles (Byrne and Laier, 1996; Desai, 1996). While women's activities in providing social services for communities such as in health, education, and housing are frequently considered culturally acceptable, women often experience severe rejection and opposition from men when it comes to their involvement in governance in terms of decision-making processes and political activities.

Some feminists have argued that the disappearance of women's political participation basically derived from the definition of politics as a male activity while activities in which women were frequently involved, such as human nurturance and food, were not considered as political (Bouroque and Grossholtz, 1998; Sapiro, 1998). In this view the divisive constructions of public and private are placed in opposition to each other. This private and public division has continuously institutionalised women's exclusion from the public sphere (Baden, 2000). However, the distinction between public and private sphere which has its roots in Western liberal thought may not be adequate in explaining the subordination of women in the Third World countries due to the diversity of meaning and interpretation of the private and public sphere across countries and cultures (Boyd, 1997; Baker, 1999). The subordination of women in third world countries should rather be looked upon as multiplicity of structures in which women interact in their daily life activities (Boyd, 1997; Buss, 1997).

Local government is frequently pointed out as an entry point for changing the political agenda to be more gender sensitive (Philips, 1996; Mauclay, 1998). The significance of local government as 'a strategic site for women's empowerment' is argued by Waylen (1996:136) as follows:

As the level of government with the most direct influence on the daily lives of women, local governments have a critical role to play in bringing about gender equality, and can be a key motor for change and development... Within the responsibilities of most local governments lie the provision of social and welfare, education, health, and child-care services, all of which are recognised as being important potential catalysts for improving the living standards and status of women.

The division between private and public becomes blurred at the local level providing an entry point for women's empowerment. At this point, decentralisation as the transfer of power from central government to local government may open the way for enhancing women's participation in influencing local development policymaking. On the other hand, women's multiple roles and responsibilities assigned by the community along with the neglect of the value of women's contribution by local government seem to constrain women from participating in local development process and contribute to differences between women and men in local governance.

Up until the 1990s gender received little attention in local governance debate. Both international development agencies and studies on local government which are based on a gender perspective have since helped in bringing the gender issue to the forefront of the debate on governance theories and practice. However, much of the thought on women and local government - which is based on Western concepts and experiences - focuses on women working within local government (Grant and Tancred, 1992; Halford, 1992; Little 1994; Philip, 1996; Pringle and Watson, 1998). The experiences of women in Third World countries in local government differ from those of women in Western countries, since the roles and functions of local government and also the women's needs and interests are different (Desai, 1996; Mauclay, 1998; Honour et al., 1998).

Despite differences in cultural and political systems, analysis based on 15 country reports on local government in Asia and the Pacific notes slow progress in the achievement of gender equality in all of these countries (UNESCAP, 1998). There is clearly a need for the integration of a gender agenda in local governance (Bhatta and Gonzales III, 1998; UNESCAP, 1998). In practice, women have generally been unable to secure a strong presence, or push their gender interests in local government (Byrne and Laier, 1996:29-30). Even with the existence of affirmative action, women in developing countries still experience difficulties in gaining seats in local government (UNESCAP, 1998).

Experiences in several developing countries show that through alliances with community based organisations, NGOs and local government, women have - to some degree - succeeded in making local governance and policy making more gender sensitive (Mauclay, 1998; Budlender, 2000). The inclusion of gender sensitivity as an objective of local government in Uganda as the result of coalition building and gender dialogue between women and other stakeholders in governance pioneered by the Uganda Women's Caucus (Mukiibi, 2000), provides a case for the effectiveness of synergetic interaction between diverse stakeholders involved in empowering women.

Similarly, a New Delhi meeting on women's political participation concludes that strengthening networks with other stakeholders in local governance may contribute to gender equity (Oquist, 2000:71-72).

The empowerment of women at the local level cannot be left only to local government or women working within the local government. As with other state institutions, we cannot assume that local government institutions are gender neutral. Although they do not publicly acknowledge gender differences and discrimination, government structures and processes produce gender inequity as they tend to be more responsive to men's interest (Lahti and Kelly, 1995; Goetz, 1997; Scott, 1999; Taylor, 2000; Bhatta, 2001). Despite differences in engendering local governance in different countries, women largely remain excluded from fully participating in, controlling and benefiting from social, economic and political resources at the local level on an equal footing with men.

Feminist politics frequently point out that decentralisation will bring politics closer to home while at the same time it may help shift the balance between women and men by providing power and opportunities conducive to bringing transformation at the local level (Halford, 1992; Philips, 1996; Beal, 1997; Mauclay, 1998; Philips, 1998). This argument suggests that women are more likely to engage in politics at the local level, or more likely to concern themselves with issues and decisions that are made in their local environment since they are more relevant to women. Through their understanding and knowledge of daily neighbourhood affairs, women become effective agents of change in proposing relevant and useful ideas for solving problems at the local level (Beal, 1997). On the other hand, local government-elected offices are assumed to be more accessible to women due to their locality and part-time characteristic (Beetham, 1996). Thus, decentralisation as the transfer of power from the central government to local government may provide more space and opportunities for women to represent their needs and interests than does central government.

The urgency of incorporating gender sensitivity into local governance in Indonesia

The neglect of women in Indonesia's development process is inseparable from the exclusion of women in planning structures and processes. Development planning in Indonesia officially recognises the benefits of local participation and local contributions to national development through decentralisation. Yet, in its implementation, the UU No.5/1974 (Law 5 of 1974) as the basic reference for decentralisation has faced difficulties in balancing a top-down and bottom-up approach. It has been suggested that the development process is too centralistic and bureaucratic (Sarundadjang, 1999), thus it oppresses local initiatives and neglects specific local needs. The intertwined problems of weak local government factors - for example, lack of human resources, financial dependence on central government - and strong government factors - such as domination and vertical structures - obstructs community participation in planning. The development planning process in Indonesia is precisely described by Pope (1998:336) who notes:

No region-specific or strategic planning takes place at the district level because most of the development objectives are handed down as sectoral targets by the upper levels; so planning degenerates into a mechanistic process and no attention is paid to local problems, to specific potentials and opportunities on to the demands of the local people.

The centralistic approaches in implementing decentralisation in Indonesia along with the institutionalisation of gender ideology can lead one to question whether local government can be effective in empowering women in the development planning processes. The institutionalisation of gender ideology has preserved male domination in government bureaucracy in decision making, and has produced the tendency of male-dominated government development approaches to women. For example, based on her study in Bali, Kindon (1998) found that programme priorities and funding at the district level were determined by men rather than by women.

The ignorance of women's collective issues and needs among both central and local government planners significantly contributes to the marginality of women in development planning. Based on my informal conversations with women members of the TPP2W (Management Team for the Enhancement of Women's Role at the Local

Level), local government officials consider women's issues as merely women's problems not national problems, thus, women's programs are not a priority in local government development policies. Moreover, other factors such as the obscurity of TPP2W basic concepts and approaches to gender empowerment, stereotypes and religion, and inadequate funds for women's empowerment activities have all hindered the accomplishment of TPP2W (TPP2W member's personal comment, March 2000).

The structure of development planning processes in Indonesia provides very limited scope for women's involvement. NGOs and community organisations may participate in planning only through PKK (the Family Guidance Welfare Organisation). While the vertical path from the central government (top-down approach) is very obvious, the path for women's participation in planning at the local level (bottom-up approach) is very vague.

Although national development policies in Indonesia identify the important roles of women in development, women are still marginalised in controlling and benefiting from the development process. For example, TPP2W - which was formed in 1995 - is aimed at enhancing women's role at the local level, but it is yet to fulfil its mission because of the bureaucratisation of this team. Gender insensitivity of bureaucrats at the local level has contributed to the neglect of women's empowerment in development programmes.

On the other hand, community organisations concerned with gender issues experience internal constraints such as limited financial and human resources, unclear visions and understanding of the concept of gender, weak networking and lack of access to the development planning process. Moreover, these organisations focus mainly on economic development, and have neglected political empowerment programmes which also can play a significant role in making local governance more gender sensitive.

In 2001 greater autonomy was granted to local governments in Indonesia to decide upon and conduct local development initiatives based on their own regional potential and characteristics. The recent issuance of UU No 22/1999 (Law on Local Government),

constitutionally changed the relationship and position between central and local governments by limiting central government power to the areas of the judiciary, security and defence, foreign policy and other activities specified by government regulations, while the regions have authority over all other activities outside these central government authorities. Based on this law, local government comprises provincial, city/municipality and village levels which are equal in position and independent from each other. This new law is intended to increase the capacity of civil society and community participation by strengthening people's representation in monitoring and requiring for accountability of the executive. With the increasing power of the local government which has to be accountable to people's representatives the law intends that local governance in Indonesia will be more participatory and will be enabled to act in accordance with the community's needs and aspirations.

However, the stress on strengthening local government and people's representation which is stipulated in the new law may be inadequate in enhancing community participation, let alone in being sensitive to women's needs, and interests and empowering for women. It focuses heavily on devolving power to local authorities and representatives, yet does not mention the devolution of power to the community. This is an important issue if local government is to be accountable to the community.

Moreover, this law still lacks a gender perspective. None of the chapters in UU No.22/1999 recognises the importance of a gender perspective in local governance. The previous law on local government was heavily focused on economic growth as the measurement of achievement in implementing local governments' programmes. This emphasis on growth, along with the gender insensitivity of local government and its mechanisms, has marginalised women and led to their invisibility in local governance in Indonesia. Without specific provisions in the laws and programmes for women's empowerment at the local level, the devolution of power to local government will continually exclude women from determining local development agendas.

The implementation of the UU No.22/1999, therefore, will provide opportunities as well as threats for women in participating in, and benefiting from, the development process. It is at this critical time of changes in the political system in Indonesia that exploration of the interaction between women, community organisations and local government in engendering local governance is crucial in order to see how women can be empowered to determine their own roles in development rather than being merely used as a vehicle for development.

Research Objectives

In the light of the foregoing discussion, the objectives of the study are as follows:

- To identify North Sumatran women's perceptions and aspirations concerning the role of local government which then will be used to develop criteria as to what constitutes gender-sensitive local governance.
- To identify structural and institutional problems facing local government in engendering local governance in North Sumatra and in building a synergistic partnership with women and community organisations.
- To explore patterns of relationships between women, community organisations and local government and their diverse strategies in struggling to integrate women's interests and needs into local governance.
- To identify strategies and mechanisms on how to foster an empowering and synergistic relationship between women, community and local government in engendering local governance.

Research Questions

Based on the research objectives, I have formulated the following research questions:

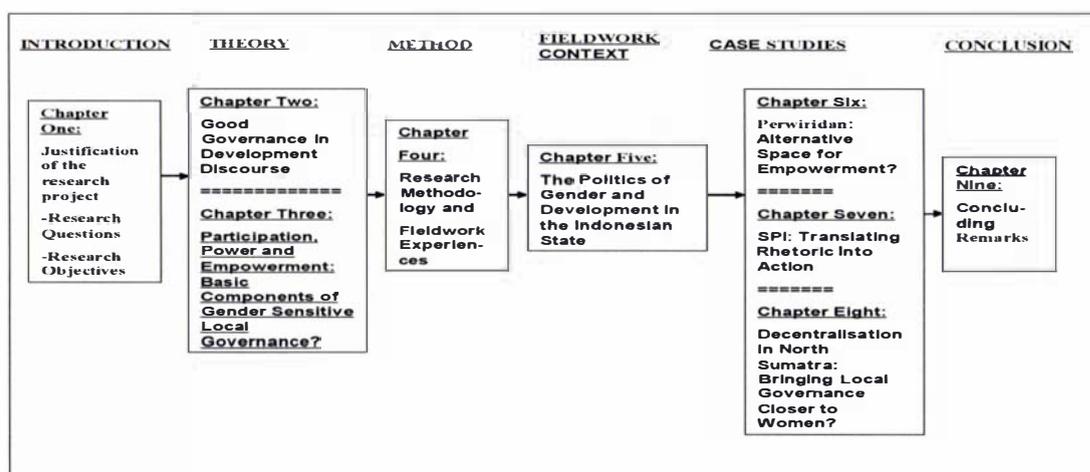
- Why is there a need for gender sensitivity in local governance?
- What constitutes gender sensitivity in local governance?
- What problems do women and local governments face in realising gender sensitivity in local governance?

- How are women currently organised at local levels and how effective are they in influencing decision making at the local level?
- Under what circumstances and in what ways do women and community organisations collaborate among themselves to ensure the accountability of local government?
- Does decentralisation bring local governance closer to women? If so, how?
- How can a synergistic relationship between women, community organisations and local government be achieved in engendering local governance?

Organisation of the Thesis

This thesis is organised into nine chapters, as outlined in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Thesis Structure



In Chapter One I have introduced the theoretical and empirical background to the urgency of discussing gender in local governance. This chapter briefly describes the objectives of the research, research questions and the argument for using the concept of governance rather than government in discussing the engendering of local governance in North Sumatra.

Chapters Two and Three provide a theoretical framework for discussion on the state and local governance from a gender perspective. In Chapter Two, I explore the evolution of

definitions and concepts of government and governance which are crucial in understanding both theoretical and practical difficulties in engendering local governance and the invisibility of women in local governance. Discussion surrounding the concepts of participation, power and empowerment in Chapter Three strengthens the argument for the urgency of incorporating gender perspective in local governance theory and practice. It also discusses the influences of WID and GAD approaches on the engendering of local governance. Elaboration on women's agency highlights alternative strategies women at the grassroots use in responding to the above approaches and in challenging and reconstructing gendered processes and structures in local governance. In these two chapters I describe, in detail, key terms used in this thesis.

Chapter Four focuses on research philosophy, and methods and techniques used in exploring gender and local governance in North Sumatra. This chapter provides explanations on my reasons for choosing the methods and techniques, problems I experienced and how these techniques can be used and adapted in solving problems I encountered in the field. A section on reflexivity in this chapter is important for understanding the limitations and strengths of this study, and demonstrates the need for researchers to be flexible when implementing carefully designed research projects.

Chapter Five discusses the politics of gender and development in Indonesia. In this chapter I trace the evolution of the reproduction of gender ideology which contributes to the persistence and strengthening of gender inequity in Indonesia. I also discuss, in general, the impact of decentralisation on institutions for women's empowerment at the local and national level.

Chapters Six through Eight explore the realms of interaction between women, community organisations and local governance in North Sumatra, each comprising a detailed case study of an organisation or issue. These chapters are central to my argument on the urgency to focus on women's agency in discussing gender and local governance. Chapter Six, on *Perwiridan*, is a critical case study since it argues for the centrality of women's religious groupings as an alternative way of achieving women's

empowerment. Literature on gender and development is yet to give adequate attention to this kind of religious grouping despite its relevance to the majority of women at the grassroots in a country like Indonesia.

The second case study, Chapter Seven highlights how by participating in SPI (*Serikat Perempuan Independen/* Unitary of Independent Women), women at the grassroots may extend their participation to formal politics. It explores how a gender-focused NGO and grassroots women's organisations collaborated to transform personal empowerment into collective empowerment. Both case studies on *Perwiridan* and SPI highlight how women in their daily lives continuously challenge, adapt and adjust themselves to their surroundings and the existing gender relations in their attempt to reformulate and reshape local governance.

In Chapter Eight I examine the impacts of the implementation of Law 22/1999 on decentralisation and local government on women in North Sumatra. This chapter seeks to answer the question of whether decentralisation will, as suggested by some feminists, bring local government closer to women. It elaborates on patriarchy at the community level and gendered local government processes and institutions as intertwined challenges to the engendering of local governance in North Sumatra. The case study of VRB (the village level representative body) in Deli Serdang highlights the gender differential impacts of decentralisation and how women at the grassroots level struggle to reshape decentralisation by extending their participation to the newly established formal political institutions which emerge as the result of decentralisation.

In Chapter Nine I summarise my findings, discuss their implications, and specify some of the theoretical and empirical challenges that need to be explored further in the study on gender and local governance in development discourse. In this chapter I reassert the central argument in this thesis that the concept of local governance needs to be reformulated to integrate women's experiences, interests and interpretations as to what constitutes gender sensitive local governance.

Summary

In this introductory chapter I have outlined the neglect of gender in discussions on local government and in the implementation of government programmes at the local level. Despite women's significant contribution in supporting household livelihood and community development, they remain excluded from critical decision making at the local level. The intertwining of gendered structures of local government and gendered constructions of the community contribute to the marginality of women in local governance.

The implementation of Law 22/1999 on decentralisation and local government brings institutional and political changes to Indonesia which significantly influence the implementation of women's empowerment programmes at the local level. This study examines the impact of decentralisation on women in North Sumatra. It raises a range of issues involving local government institutions and policies, women's empowerment, and the interaction between women, NGO and local government, and the relevance of all these for engendering local governance in North Sumatra.

Considering the invisibility of women in local governance in North Sumatra, this study focuses heavily on women's agency in redefining and reconstructing their identities and interactions in engendering local governance. Elaboration of women's agency is crucial in bringing up grassroots women's voices and in revealing the diversity of women's daily strategies in participating in local governance. Interpretation of, and approaches to, gender-sensitive local governance varies across stakeholders in local governance. Rather than imposing a fixed definitions of gender sensitive local governance, this study explores women's perceptions on what constitutes gender sensitive local governance. It seeks to explore hidden narratives at the grassroots level which have long been overlooked in development literature on gender and local governance.

CHAPTER TWO

GOOD GOVERNANCE AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN DEVELOPMENT DISCOURSE

Introduction

This chapter explores the concepts of the state, governance and local governance from a gender perspective. Discussions on the state and gender relations are crucial for understanding the complexities women face at the local level. The role of the state in influencing women's lives, whether positively or negatively, cannot be ignored if we want to explore women's struggles at the local level. Issues to consider include the composition of the controllers of the state apparatus, the staffing of the state machinery and its internal organisations, what the state does, whom it affects, and how (Franzway et al., 1989).

In answering the question of whether local government is more accessible and responsive to women's needs than national government, I will first discuss the concept of citizenship and then explore diverse feminist perspectives on the state since they provide a crucial starting point for understanding the persistent gendered relationship between women and the state. Considering the influence of the state on both women's lives and local government, I will then elaborate on the factors which I consider significant in determining the affinity between local government and women: the competing values of participation and efficiency in local government, and the bureaucratic mire of local government.

In the following section, I will discuss the evolution of the concept of government to governance and its implications for women. Governance is a key concept in current development debates. The concept of governance, which includes accountability, participation, transparency and human rights as its basic components, is considered a crucial requirement for the success of development, especially in developing countries. International development agencies with diverse interpretations, yet similar emphasis on governance substantiate these components of governance in terms of good governance. Since the 1990s good governance has become an issue of conditionality in promoting

accountable and effective governance in aid recipient countries. However, concerns over the imposition of the Western concepts of governance and good governance by international development agencies onto developing countries and the inconsistencies in the application of 'good governance' among developing countries, bring concepts of governance and good governance into the centre of development debates.

This chapter also examines the principles of good governance and tensions it creates when implemented in a way that neglects the cultural, political and historical diversity found within most countries. I will first elaborate on the debates surrounding the definitions and usage of governance. However, this chapter does not intend to establish a fixed definition of governance, rather, it will focus on discussion on diverse concepts of governance in order to gain insights into the complexities of the implementation of governance. I will argue that since governance is an interactive process of governing, a governance approach rather than a government approach provides a suitable framework for examining processes of governing. Thus, I will use the governance concept primarily as a descriptive and analytical tool through which several questions crucial to understanding governance can be posed: What are the notions of governance? What kind of interaction will best serve the inclusion of a variety of stakeholders in influencing development policies? If governance means plurality in interactions, how accessible are they to women? In what ways do concepts of government and governance differ in explaining the empowerment of women in local development? Have diverse definitions of good governance incorporated a gendered understanding of policy and implementation?

Citizenship

Discussion on citizenship is crucial in understanding the gendered nature of the state and how the structural nature of gender relations at the state level results in gendered local government institutions, policies and actions. Citizenship determines how women's interests are formulated and how they are served by the state and its mechanisms at all levels of governance. The Western liberal concepts of citizenship frequently use the division of the private and public spheres to explain the marginality

of women in governance. Based on this Western notion of citizenship only those who are actively involved in public are considered eligible to rights as citizens (Baker, 1999; Preece, 2002). Women are perceived as having their primary roles in the private sphere. 'The private world of motherhood, in which women's citizenship activity is perceived specifically as the procreation of tomorrow's citizens, is commonly used to exclude women from the public world of citizenship' (Preece, 2002:26). Thus, the Western liberal concept of citizenship places the public and the private sphere as two distinct and opposite spheres in which women's place is in the private sphere and men dominate the public sphere.

The division of private and public in dominant Western concepts of citizenship has been criticised by feminists since this division is perceived as strengthening women's subordination. As Dominelli argues:

...defining womanhood in terms of domestic labour confines women to the private arena while men dominate the public one where acknowledged power and authority reside. Keeping these two spheres separate is essential in maintaining relations of subordination and domination (Dominelli, 1991:267).

During the 1970s feminists argued for the inseparability of the private and public by declaring that the 'personal' is also 'political', thus relationships in the private sphere must be brought into 'the protection of the public sphere' (Boyd, 1997:10-11).

The usefulness of the separation of public and private in explaining the citizenship of women in developing countries has also been challenged by some feminists (Molyneux, 2001; Anandhi, 2002; Bodur and Franceshet, 2002). Through their writing on women in developing countries, feminists contribute significantly in highlighting diversity among women in discussing relations between women and citizenship. Culture, race, religion, age and sexual orientation define the dividing line between public and private spheres (Boyd, 1997:15; Lister, 1997:14). In other words, the concept of gender rather than sex is more relevant in discussing citizenship (Lister, 1997:14). As Yuval-Davis (cited in Lister, 1997:14) argues, the dividing line is 'a culture specific line and is one which is drawn in different places for different groups according to the amount of power they wield'.

By emphasising the division between the public and private spheres as the key to understanding women's oppression, the Western liberal concept of citizenship, which is rooted in Western culture, is unable to explain the oppression as well as the citizenship of women in developing countries. Many studies on women in developing countries argue for the interdependence between the private and public spheres (Tripp, 1998; Rai, 1999; Molyneux, 2001; Anandhi, 2002; Bodur and Franceshet, 2002). Contradicting the devaluation of motherhood in Western liberal concepts of citizenship, in Latin America the concept of citizenship for women is based on 'idealised representations of motherhood and wifely duty' (Molyneux, 2001:169). In the case of Chile, women exploit state gender ideology, which divides the public from the private spheres, to mobilise support and penetrate the state in pursuing their goals (Bodur and Franceshet, 2002). Drawing on state gender ideology which perceived women as wives and mothers, women put demand that the state must protect them from violence and deprivation in their daily lives which contradict with the state gender ideology. Thus, the use of the Western liberal concept of citizenship in explaining the oppressions of women in developing countries can be perceived as an hegemony and imposition of Western values on women in Third World countries. As Buss (1997:366) succinctly argues 'using the public-private distinction as the key to understanding women's oppressions means that 'other' women's experiences will always be filtered through Western analytic categories and Western ways of knowing'.

The absolute separation of public and private spheres also undermines the role of local level organisations in reshaping the dividing line of private and public spheres. Based on experiences from developing countries, the remainder of this chapter highlights difficulties in separating the private and public sphere since the two spheres are interdependent and are used interchangeably by women to extend their participation and empowerment. Through their daily 'private' activities and strategies individually and/or collectively, women in developing countries shift the dividing line between the private and public sphere. This ability of grassroots women in developing countries reveals that

‘the demarcation of the public – private division is a political act rather than a natural one’ (Boyd, 1997:16).

Feminist writers stress that the deconstruction of the division of private and public spheres in the Western liberal concept of citizenship is urgent in order to be able to understand the roots of oppressions and citizenship of women in developing countries (Rai, 1999; Molyneux, 2001; Anandhi, 2002; Bodur and Franceshet, 2002). Using a poststructuralist approach, some feminists argue for ‘a broader, more inclusive, ethical definition of active citizenship that, in turn, will influence how people learn to be citizens and take part in governance’ (Preece, 2002:21). Ethical definition of active citizenship implies:

a ‘women friendly conception of citizenship : one which combines the gender-neutrality of an approach which seeks to enable women to participate with men as equals in the public sphere (suitably transformed) with a gender differentiated recognition and valuing of women’s responsibility in the private sphere’ (Lister, 2000:74).

Thus, everyday life should become central in defining concepts of citizenship since ‘it was only in that way that women’s worth could be identified and valued and that their distinctive political subjectivity could find expression’ (Molyneux, 2001:175). In this new concept of citizenship, the family (the locus wherein women practise their citizenship) although still largely ignored as locus of ‘public’ citizenship activity (Preece, 2002:27), is brought into the heart of citizenship. It insists on the recognition of the diversity of forms of women’s and minorities’ participation in pursuing their diverse goals (Anandhi, 2002: 427). An ethical and gender-friendly conception of citizens needs to value differences among women and men as equally important, thus posits men and women as equal citizens.

Feminist Perspectives on the State

Despite their rejection of the division between private and public spheres in the dominant Western concept of citizenship, feminists diverge not only in their views on

the theorisation of gender inequality but also on the nature and role of state institutions. Liberal feminists assume that 'the state is a monolithic, all-seeing, all-knowing corpus, which will always act in the most advantageous way possible for existing power relations' (Halford, 1992:158). Gender inequality is viewed as the result of individual cases of discrimination combined sometimes with the existence of sex-role stereotyping in education and the labour market (Pringle and Watson, 1998). Access to education and legal reform aim primarily at increasing women's professional and occupational status, thus enabling women to compete equally with men. The state is regarded as a neutral arbiter in equalising gender relations by removing discriminatory laws and policies. The introduction of women's initiatives and representatives into local government, then, could be a prime strategy from a liberal feminist perspective (Halford, 1992). Thus, liberal strategies rely heavily on legal remedies.

On the other hand, the Marxist feminist perspective perceives state institutions as instruments with a dominant interest in exploiting women. Differing from the liberal feminist perspective, this perspective tends to focus on the oppressive aspects of the state. It argues that the state participates in oppressing women through its function in protecting capitalism and racism (Dietz, 1998). The strategy to overcome this oppression, therefore, is the mobilisation of women into economic spheres. Through its political critique on capitalism, a Marxist feminist perspective contributes in challenging the liberal assumption that 'representative government is the sole sanctuary for politics and the legitimate arbiter of social change' (Dietz, 1998:385). Yet, by overemphasising the effectiveness with which the welfare state reproduces the capitalist mode of production through women's dependence upon men within the family, it fails in explaining convincingly just why the state should need to reinforce masculine dominance and privilege (Pringle and Watson, 1998).

Elaborating more on the oppressive aspects of the state and the incapability of the male-dominated and patriarchal state in protecting women, radical feminists resist and ignore state action, both individually and collectively. They view the attempt to work within the state arenas with suspicion because they believe it will lead only to the cooptation of

women (Pringle and Watson, 1998). Radical feminists argue for the urgent need to keep distance from the state, instead engaging in politics by using nonconventional political strategies which emphasise the purity and autonomy of responses to women's concerns for example, by using streets, fields and the home rather than what they see as 'hallowed institutional halls of men's political machinery' (Staudt, 1998:28). In this strategy the separation of women and men is urgent (Sapiro, 1998).

Western universalism as reflected in both Marxist and liberal models above, ignores the peculiarities of political structures and function of states in Third World countries and thus fails to explain the existence of Third World women's political participation and resistance in various locations (Udayagiri, 1995; Tong, 1998; Rai, 1999). Besides these feminist perspectives, there is a poststructuralist feminism which I regard as more capable of explaining the relationship between the state and women in the Third World since it allows for the diversity of women in Third World countries. Poststructuralist feminists, thus, provide new ways in capturing the perception and knowledge of Third World women based on the complexities and varieties of their daily life experiences.

Drawing greatly on Foucault's concept of power, poststructuralist perspectives view the state as 'a hierarchically arranged multiplicity of power relations' (Pringle and Watson, 1998:32). The state is a result of political struggle rather than a unified structure. As a site of struggle, the state does not lie outside of society and social processes, but on the one hand has a degree of autonomy from these which varies under particular circumstances, and on the other is influenced by them (Fransway et al., 1989; Waylen, 1996:15). Hence, the focus of the analysis of public power should not be an impossible unity of the state, but of micro-level organisations and institutions that affect individuals' daily lives (Rai, 1996:27). Recognition of the manifold structures of power in the poststructural perspective's definition of the state reveals that Third World women actively struggle for their interest through various forms of resistance and movements (Mohanty 1991; Udayagiri, 1995). The poststructuralist perspective has contributed to the theorising of the state through its insistence that the state cannot be

viewed as a unity in spite of its reality as 'a network of power relations existing in cooperation and also in tension' (Rai, 1996:36).

Viewing the state as a location for the struggle of diverse actors and structures may lead to a better understanding of the relationship between women and the state. For women in the Third World, the state and civil society are both complex terrains: fractured, oppressive, threatening and also providing spaces for struggle and negotiation. Both state and civil society form the boundaries within which women act and are acted upon (Jayawardena, 1986; Afshar, 1996). Focusing mainly on the power of the state obscures the reality of the variety of women's struggles which take many forms - from opposition through to cooperation. For example, there may be subversion not simply of rules but of articulated intentions of state form, or negotiations in challenging patriarchal structures while at the same time attempting to bring alternatives (Rai, 1996:37).

The following section contains a discussion of the significant of local government as a site of power struggle within the state and how significant it is for women in pursuing their interests.

Competing Values of Efficiency and Democracy in Local Government

Basically, there are three core arguments for local government that have been established by nineteenth and early twentieth century theorists: local government provides an opportunity for political participation, it ensures efficient service delivery, and it expresses a tradition of opposition to an overly centralised government (Stokker, 1996). Differences among these arguments continuously develop into competing paradigms on local government, especially between the proponents of political participation and those who stress the technical aspect based on efficiency as the most ultimate justification for the role of local government.

In the 1970s, there was a growing demand to reduce the status and role of the state since it was considered as having too much power and control. Local government - with its

major promise of being more responsive to people's needs through people's participation - and government accountability offered an attractive development strategy. It is argued that local government needs local community support in implementing its programs, therefore local government will be more responsive to local needs (Hadenius and Uggla, 1996). Local level decision making based on participation and accountability, it is suggested, will create a community's sense of belonging and responsibility so that the community will contribute to local government while at the same time creating legitimacy for local government (Plein et al., 1998).

For the early advocates of local government, political participation serves as the basic argument for local government. The liberal and radical approaches see the devolution of power to local government as 'a means of promoting a new communitarian spirit and forming the seedbed of democratic practice' (Mohan and Stokke, 1995:250). The democratic idea of local government implies that active participation of the citizens in local affairs is both a goal in itself and an instrument for strengthening society at large since participation allows each citizen the right to influence government decision making in several ways. Firstly, participation represents a real occasion to influence the decisions about everyday life; it narrows the gap between the rulers and the ruled. Second, it creates the possibility for political education. Active participation in local affairs might be perceived as the most important training ground for democracy. By participating in administration of districts and counties, directly or indirectly, the citizens become familiar with public issues. They become, the argument goes, more sensitive to the need for setting priorities and for reaching compromises between different legitimate interests. Third, there is an assumption in this argument of a connection between local participation and the feeling of solidarity in community (Kjelberg, 1995:43). Thus, citizen participation is viewed as revitalising democratic practice in general by giving opportunities for local self-government to the average citizen (Stollman et al., 1979).

On the other hand, the reformists argue that the major role of local government is as service provider rather than to support political democracy. In the 1950s the concept of

decentralisation was focused on the technical managerial term in public administration which neglected the component of democracy. Efficiency became the fundamental concept in implementing decentralisation. There is a tendency to separate the technical and political components of decentralisation. In this approach local is perceived as 'a function of economic space to achieve efficient service delivery' (Mohan and Stokke, 2000:251). Participation by the people is considered as inefficient (Yeatman, 1990). Therefore, under this approach efficiency is the strongest point for local government through its role as 'coordinator of services in the field, as a reconciler of community opinion; as a consumer pressure group, as an agent for responding to rising demand, as a counterweight to incipient syndicalism' (Sharpe quoted in Stoker, 1996:9).

Since the 1980s the debate has shifted from the contribution of local government as service provider to the political value of local government as a bulwark against an overcentralised state. The liberal and radical theorists of local government argue that local government function cannot be viewed merely in technical terms of efficiency. In this view democracy cannot be subsumed under an efficiency consideration. 'We value democracy because, although it is inefficient in non-democratic terms, it is the only form of government (in democratic terms) which can allow for the expression of interests' (Battin, 1991:303). In addition, decentralisation, trust, rapid adaptation, and concept of stakeholders became the strategy for participation and gender equity.

The growing demands both from the South and World Bank for participatory development (Nelson and Wright, 1995) strengthened the political value of local government. Participation began to be viewed as crucial for equity-enhancing and self-reliant development. This people-centred approach has political implications, since it requires considerable decentralisation of decision making and can thus lead to empowerment. It not only provides the driving force for collective development, but also reaffirms the fundamental right to self-determination (Beaulieu and Manoukian, 1995). While the defence of cultural difference and livelihoods serves as the main principle (Mohan and Stokke, 2000), individual and collective empowerment, which

includes more direct involvement of citizens in the policy making process, becomes the ultimate goal of the participatory approach.

Participation at the 'Local' Level

The tendency towards essentialising the local in participatory development is considered as neglecting problems which arise from the structure and the character of the local itself. Mohan and Stokke (2000) argue that overemphasis on the value of the local tends to underplay both economic and political issues which means that local social inequalities and power relations are downplayed. Another problem is the tendency to view 'the local' in isolation from broader economic and political structures in which the contextuality of place - including national and transnational economic forces - is neglected. As Mohan and Stokke argue: 'Local participation can be used for different purposes by very different stakeholders. It can underplay the role of the state and transnational power holders and can, overtly or inadvertently, cement Eurocentric solutions to Third World development' (2000:263). Their argument for a stronger emphasis on the politics of the local and on the political use of the local by hegemonic and counter hegemonic interests contributes in highlighting both external and internal community obstacles to participation.

Cases in the Third World reveal that along with the external factors, structural and societal actors characterised by the domination and dependence upon local elites create fatalism and the incapacity of the people to make decisions, thus, it is the local traditional patrons who more frequently benefit from, and take control, over development processes (Mathur, 1995; Hadenius and Ugglå, 1996). It is women who are often particularly marginalised and disadvantaged in benefiting from participation in development initiatives (Mathur, 1995; Vagliani, 1995; Blair, 2000).

Country reports on local governments in Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP, 2000) also point out problems of participation which arise from the limited capability and willingness of the people to participate in governance. In these cases the community has little knowledge of the nature and function of local government. People at the grassroots

level need more than the provision of institutional mechanisms for participation. They need government intervention in establishing empowering techniques for community participation. As a country report from Sri Lanka notes, the community participates only in elections (UNESCAP, 2000). Thereafter, this participation is dominated by traditional stronger members of the society.

From the foregoing discussion it is obvious that we cannot assume that use of the concept of participation in local government will automatically enhance popular participation, let alone gender equity. While on the one hand local government may misuse participation whether in the form of political cooptation or in contribution in the form of labour (Nelson and Wright 1995), on the other hand, local government offers an attractive major promise that popular participation and accountability will be more responsive to people's needs and more effective in delivering services for the community (Blair, 2000). At this point, rather than differentiating participation as a means to achieve efficient and effective development projects and goals, and participation as an end in which people control their own development process, it is crucial to view the rationale for participation in local government as both instrumental and final.

The achievement of democratic participation depends on whether it secures greater popular control over collective decision making, and greater equality in its exercise (King and Stokker, 1996). Genuine participation in everyday economic and social activities is a major dimension of human, legal and political rights (which includes all those who are affected) (Schneider and Liebcier 1995). The most crucial elements in this kind of participation are a partnership built upon the basis of a dialogue among the various actors (stakeholders), during which the agenda is set jointly, and local views and indigenous knowledge are deliberately sought and respected (Schneider and Liebcier, 1995). The experience of the CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency) in supporting the creation of good governance in Ghana reveals that the interplay between community action at the local level and political structures such as district assemblies may provide a focal point for a governance project (Beauliau and Manoukian,

1995:219). In India, joint management between local government agencies and the community has enabled local government to be more participatory (Mathur, 1995). Thus, partnership between local government and the community is crucial in ensuring that participation will not be used by local government solely to mobilise the society to meet goals it has set. Partnership, which is the core of governance, means that both local government and the community actively participate in decision making.

By discussing partnership in the development of concepts of governance, we will understand how and why the concept of governance rather than government is more suitable in capturing the interaction between local government and the community.

Government or Governance?

Governance has long been equated with 'governing', the process aspect of government (Mayntz, 1998). The first paradigm of political theory on governance perceives governing as steering, a top-down approach in policy making and policy implementation (Mayntz, 1998). Thus, governing becomes a linear model in which power is used to secure the implementation of policies that have been determined by the rulers. In this model of governing, rulers are strictly differentiated from the ruled, which creates a win and lose game of power. Deviations amongst the ruled people's reactions towards the determined policies, norms and rules are considered as threats towards the power of the ruler. This creates suspicion between the ruler and the ruled. This mode of governing causes the implementation and enforcement of policies and programmes to become more intensive and expensive (Dunsire, 1993:24) since the state has all the responsibilities and acts as a single agent in policy making and implementation. The huge burden on the state, plus the rigidity and clumsiness of its bureaucratic structure, reduce the capability of the state to establish close relations with the society which then contributes to the state's loss of legitimacy (Peters and Pierre, 1998). This way of governing contradicts that of voluntary obedience of the people argued by Spinoza (1677 cited in Dunsire, 1993:30):

Men [sic] should be governed in such a way that they do not regard themselves as being governed, but as following their own bent and their own free choice in

their manner of life; in such a way, then, that they are restrained only by love of freedom, desire to increase their possessions, and the hope of obtaining offices of the state.

Dissatisfaction with the state's performance as the centre of political control in dealing with pluralist demands from the public gave rise to support for 'governance'. Discussion on governing diverts attention to alternative forms of societal governance which put more value on the potential and capabilities of the society itself in governing. The search for alternative forms of societal governance develops into two separate lines of discussion: the market principles and horizontal self-organisation (Mayntz, 1998). Based on the political ideology of neoliberalism and Thatcherism, the market principles emphasise deregulation and privatisation as the main instruments in achieving both economic growth and economic efficiency. The private sector rather than the state is considered as being more effective as an agent of development (Mayntz, 1998; Peters and Pierre, 1998). In horizontal self-organisation the state actors still occupy a special position as participants in policy networks in which they maintain crucial means of intervention even where there is devolution of decision making to institutions of societal government (Mayntz, 1998). The dialogic rationality of governance is ensured through the nature of the reciprocity between actors in which, in order to gain some political influence and benefit from better overall functioning of the system, individual economic partners give some of their autonomy to the state. On the other hand the state gives some of its authority in decision making to influence economic activities (Jessop, 1998).

Diverse definitions of governance emerge in this new paradigm of governance. The UNDP (1997) defines governance as 'the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority in the management of a country's affairs at all levels'. This definition equates governance with the management of society. However, the complexity of the interdependency between the state, community and private sector in fulfilling the diverse public demands and interests implies that governance cannot be limited to managing the society efficiently. The World Conference on Metropolitan Governance, in its meeting in Tokyo 1993, rejected the reduction of governance to management and the division of governance into merely the political and technical dimensions. It suggested that governance should be perceived as including the visions

and strategic decisions of a country, and should include five fundamental dimensions: political, contextual, constitutional, legal and administrative/managerial. It should imply bottom-up decision making, involving all concerned people at every level of government and non-government organisations (Beal, 1996:4). The importance of cooperation and partnership between government and civil society is emphasised in the UNCHS (2000) definition of governance:

Governance is to be taken as co-operation between government and non-government actors. Good governance means effective co-operation between these actors to bring about solutions that are in the general interest and likely to receive wide support. Good governance thus entails inclusive decision-making processes.

Hence, a meaning of governance includes not only efficient management of resources and power, but also the enhancement of people's participation in the processes and structures of governance.

Patterns of interaction and networking, then, become the dominant feature of governance in this new paradigm. Kooiman (1993:258) explains governance as the '...emerging pattern (or order) of a system that is both the outcome of social processes (interactions) as well as the medium through which actors can act and interpret this pattern'. Concurring with this definition, Jessop (1998:30) refers to governance as:

'...the models and manner of governing, government to the institutions and agents charged with the governing, and governing to the act of governing itself'. These interpretations of the governance concept provide insights into defining the relationship between governing and governance.

Recently there has been a shift in the development of the governance paradigm from political guidance or steering (the first paradigm) to:

1. Governance as a new mode of governing that is distinct from the hierarchical control mode, a more cooperative mode where state and non-state actors participate in mixed public/private networks.
2. Governance as different modes of coordinating individual actions, or basic forms of social order (Mayntz, 1998:1-2).

This new paradigm of governance reveals a shift from a more traditional patterns of governing as 'one way traffic'/unilateral focus (from those governing to the governed)

to a '2 way traffic'/interactionist focus in which '(dis) qualities of social-political systems and their governance are viewed from the perspective of the recognition of mutual needs and capacities' (Kooiman, 1993:35-36).

The notions of governance brought about by the new paradigm provide a dynamic approach in understanding governance in two ways. Firstly, the notion of governance requires a focus on active processes rather than passive, static accounts of institutions. An understanding of the structure of political institutions is indispensable, as it allows for the exploration towards the ways in which the key actors have used those structures and institutions; what resources, options and strategies are available to those actors. Secondly, the notion of governance suggests a process of rule making in which government and political elites are locked into economic and social networks – these may be formal or informal, vertical hierarchies or more horizontal egalitarian relationships, cooperative or conflictual (Goldblatt, 1998:1-2). These notions of governance rest on three theoretical principles: the existence of a crisis of governability, the exhaustion of the traditional form of state intervention reflected in this crisis and the emergence of a tendency or of a convergent political trend in all the developed countries that is giving rise to a new form of governance better adapted to each context (Merrien, 1998:57).

Despite diverse definitions and interpretations of governance, debates on governance seem to agree that governance refers to styles in governing in which stakeholders create a dependent network. In these governing styles the boundaries between and within public and private sectors have become blurred. Rhodes (1997) identifies the shared characteristics of governance:

1. Interdependence between organisations. Governance is broader than government, covering non-state actors. Changing the boundaries of the state meant the boundaries between public, private and voluntary sectors became shifting and opaque.
2. Continuing interactions between network members, caused by the need to exchange resources and negotiate shared purposes.

3. Game-like interactions, rooted in trust and regulated by rules of the game negotiated and agreed by network participants.
4. A significant degree of autonomy from the state. Networks are not accountable to the state; they are self-organizing. Although the state does not occupy a sovereign position, it can indirectly steer networks (Rhodes, 1997:57).

From the foregoing discussion it is obvious that interaction and networking among mutually dependent powers become basic interrelated concepts in governance. Differing from the concept of government which is concerned mainly with institutional aspects of policy making and policy implementation, and which adopts a top-down perspective, this concept of governance focuses on processes of governing and interactions among diverse actors as mutually dependent powers. 'Governance is about managing networks, not only by government but also by the interactions between government and society; private and public institutions' (Rhodes, 1997:52). The essence of governance is its focus on governing mechanisms which do not rest on recourse to the authority and sanctions of government (Stoker, 1998). It is a dynamic process produced by the interaction of public and private (Kooiman, 1993:2). The concept of governance, which emphasises processes of governing rather than institutional aspects allows for greater attention to be given to the linking of various actors and the using of their combined potential to deal with development problems which would otherwise be neglected if we discussed only government.

To some, the dispersion of political control and policy making to collections of nonstate actors in the new paradigm of governance may be perceived as the loss of state power and control (Merrien, 1998; Peters and Pierre, 1998). However, this shift from government to governance in which there is power transfer from the state to the society cannot be considered as diminution of the power of the state. The concept of governance does not mean the state loses its power or withdraws from activities in governing or separates from the society, rather, it implies a changing form of state control (Bhatta, 1998) and a shift in the way of governing in which a state acts as a balancer of social forces and social interests and as an enabler to social actors and systems in order that they may organise themselves (Kooiman, 1993). Thus, the

preferable role of the state is as a balancer which influences and directs relations between social actors into a more desirable balance (Dunsire, 1993).

In arguing that governance implies changes in ways of governing rather than the loss of state control, Kooiman (1993:2) points out that 'in the 'co' forms of governance such as co-steering, co-managing, co-producing and co-allocating (social-political way of governing), public or private actors do not act separately but in conjunction, together, in combination' that is to say in 'co' arrangement. Hence, in governance the allocation of responsibility between public and private spheres becomes more blurred. Interaction is based on the recognition of interdependencies since the strengths and weaknesses among stakeholders differ. To succeed, 'governing' needs to cooperate and integrate stakeholders' contributions to strengthen each other (Kooiman, 1993:252).

In governance, the quality of civic engagement is of equal importance to the governing capacity of government. At this point, the synergistic relationship between government and the governed is crucial. Evans (1998) provides a useful definition of synergy as mutually reinforcing relations between governments and groups of engaged citizens which rests on a relational basis: 'An intimate interconnection and intermingling among public and private actors is combined with a well-defined complementary division of labor between the bureaucracy and local citizens, mutually recognized and accepted by both sides'. As enabler, government is expected to 'enable not only highly organized and strong actors but also individual citizens and social movements to infiltrate within the administration and to be represented within the policy making process' (Kooiman, 1993:257). Thus, synergy in governance goes beyond the question of how to make the strengths and weaknesses of diverse stakeholders become complementary to the creation of embeddedness between society and government.

Order, rule and collective action are the expected outcomes of both government and governance: 'Governance is ultimately concerned with creating the conditions for ordered rule and collective action. The outputs of governance are not therefore different from those of government. It is rather a matter of a difference in processes '(Stoker,

1998:17). Whereas government (as the first paradigm of governance) reveals the hierarchic mode of governing in which government officials and institutions guide or steer policy development and implementation, in governance these policies and their implementation are determined through the interaction of various stakeholders.

Although, in general, there seems to be similarity of the outcomes between government and governance – namely, order - the concept of governance requires a greater degree of participation from diverse stakeholders in achieving this objective. The concept of governance also implies the existence of networks in which diverse stakeholders depend on each other. In this new paradigm of governance, government is only one of the components in the network of governing which has to interact independently with other components. Interdependency between stakeholders implies that none of them has absolute control over the processes of governing, and this will enlarge the manoeuvring space for diverse stakeholders in influencing the processes (Peters and Pierre, 1998).

In the following section I will examine the influence of the shift from concepts of government to governance on the management of society and the quality of civic engagement at the local level.

From Local Government to Local Governance

The shift from local government to local governance means a shift from the hierarchical interaction in which the state is the single actor in governing into a plurality of actors which makes governing a more complicated process. The plurality of actors, structures and processes is also more difficult for the public to understand. This is the case especially when the political education and political awareness of a society are still at a low level. The plurality of local governance also creates increasing problems of accountability, coordination and strategic direction as different agencies compete for resources and action space with each other and with elected municipal governments (Andrew and Goldsmith, 1998:107). In the British context, for example, the use of

governance challenges the long tradition of a multipurpose local government. The shift from local government to local governance involves complex sets of organisations drawn from the public, private and voluntary organisations (Stokker, 1996: 2).

The concept of governance reduces the centrality of local government functions since these functions become dispersed among local authorities, private agencies and others. It transforms local government's role from direct service producer into a framework-setter (Walsh, 1996). Based on the concept of governance, local government is more than structures and instruments of government. It includes the involvement of citizens in voluntary associations, networks, alliances and other forms of connection in governing. Hence, local governance is not only about delivering services but also about engaging various stakeholders to participate in local affairs.

As with the complexity of actors and interactions in local governance, definitions of local governance are also diverse. USAID defines local governance as 'the process by which a community addresses their own needs, problems, and priorities through more responsive and accountable governments' (Gonzales III and Bhatta, 1998:233). This definition considers a variety of community needs and interests in local governance.

UNESCAP (1998) argues for the centrality of control in defining local governance. Local governance is the ability to reach decisions locally outside the control of a higher level of government. Local autonomy, local elections, civil society and participation become central components of local governance. Whereas administration can be delegated as an agency function, local governance itself must have a local or grassroots basis.

An IDS Workshop on Asian experiences in local governance defines local governance as 'The distribution of power, authority and resources between citizens and different tiers of government' (Robinson, 1999:20). From this definition, Robinson develops useful concepts of power, authority and resources as measurements of local governance:

- Power: the capacity to influence decisions and control resources, both of which are functions of the prevailing social and political structure. This brings up the need to acknowledge the highly unequal balance of social and political power underlining class, gender and ethnic disparities – differences which the term ‘community’ may obscure. Stakeholders at the local level do not necessarily have equal access to power or control over resources and decision making. Therefore any stakeholder analysis needs to view each actor as having a position within hierarchies of power, if it is to be meaningful.
- Authority: Governance is also about how decision-making processes acquire legitimacy, and thus we need to understand the reasons why newly localised institutions may not immediately be seen as legitimate. The process of gaining legitimacy should be based on democratic and participatory principles without threatening the already existing social structures, but this point is frequently neglected. Legitimacy can be achieved not only through election but by providing more room for people’s participation in negotiating and influencing public decision-making.
- Resources: Effective participatory local governance requires significant resources which include both the redistribution of scarce resources disseminated from the centre and the mobilisation of local resources. This is not simply a technical issue, but a political and social struggle between groups endowed with more or fewer resources, and between citizens and governmental authorities – national and local- which make and enact decisions about redistribution and generation of resources (2000:20).

Concepts in this definition provide for a more gender sensitive approach in measuring the performance of local governance than the previous definitions. The institutional model of ‘government’ focuses on one-way policy making by institutions, and in this women disappear since they are rarely involved in the legal, formal process of governing. On the other hand, ‘governance’ seems to allow more actors to get involved in governing/decision making processes as it involves a diversity of stakeholders in a variety of social contexts. It necessitates the inclusion of diverse societal actors at the local level of governance. There is a blend of public and private resources in local governance which allows for the emergence of various partnerships, thus providing a space for women to enter the process. The concept of governance which focuses on interaction and different levels - rather than the traditional, rational actor model which strongly emphasises the state and its institutions - seems to provide more space for the

emergence of women. However, does governance shift the boundaries between public and private? Prior to answering this critical question it is important to explore the 'ideal' conception of governance as proposed in good governance.

Good Governance Applied in Third World Contexts

Although good governance, which focuses on the building of efficient and capable organisations, has been the concern of development administration since the 1960s (Minogue, 2002:122), it has only recently been accorded a central place in the discourse on development. Governance is a buzzword among donors and development agencies, one which has gained much interest in the 1990s in relation to the World Bank's findings on the significance of a country's capacity as a component in achieving successful and sustainable development (Bhatta, 1998:4). The emergence of governance in development discourse is a response to persistent poverty, according to the UNDP Human Development Report 1990, which situates governance as 'the primary source of the problem in developing countries, and as the basis for solution' (Schmitz, 1995:68). This Western notion of governance has been developed by international donors in incorporating good governance as a condition when giving aid to developing countries.

International aid donors, although similarly emphasising the significance of governance, have broad definitions of governance ranging from the neutral label of governance to a more political definition of good governance. Under the label of 'good governance' the Department for International Development Administration (formerly UK Overseas Development Administration) provides an example of an 'overtly political' definition of governance (Minogue et al., 1998:5-6) consisting of four main components:

1. Legitimacy implies that a system of government must operate with the consent of those who are governed, who must therefore have the means to give or withhold that assent; such legitimacy is seen in the British policy document as most likely to be guaranteed by pluralist, multi-party democracy.
2. Accountability involves the existence of mechanisms which ensure that public officials and political leaders are answerable for their actions and use of public resources, and will require transparent government and free media.

3. Competence in making and executing appropriate public policies and delivering efficient public services is essential.

4. Respect for law and protection of human rights should buttress the entire system of good government.

On the other hand the UNDP uses a more neutral label of sound governance in which good governance is defined as addressing the allocation and management of resources to respond to collective problems, and characterised by participation, transparency, accountability, rule of law, effectiveness and equity (UNDP, 2000). This definition is more sensitive to cultural and political differences among countries since it recognises the differences in governments' responses towards the ideas of participation, individuality, order and authority and also the possibility of differences in combining efficiency and accountability across diverse forms of political authority (Minogue et al., 1998).

The World Bank has an in-between interpretation of governance which leads to a seemingly contradictory strategy. Its documents emphasise professional policy making and management in using resources effectively, thus, policy making on political interventions should be avoided. At the same time, by also emphasising the significance of strengthening civil society, the World Bank has frequently overstepped borders of its neutrality as reflected in its inability to avoid political connotations in nearly half its governance lending projects in 1991-1993 (Minogue et al., 1998).

Linking good governance to development Larmour (1998) provides another useful classification of definitions of good governance as:

1. Democratic governance, which is concerned with legitimacy, accountability, and human rights. It addresses traditional concerns of Western political theory, and tends to be invoked by bilateral aid donors, and the OECD, which links good governance to participatory development and the improvement of women's rights.

2. Effective governance, which is less concerned with the form of government and focuses more on the ability to govern. It is expressed by the World Bank, which has had

to be careful to avoid going beyond its mandate and commenting on its members' 'internal political affairs'.

3. Coordination, that sees order as the result of the actions and interactions of formally constituted governments and other private and voluntary associations. Order is not something imposed by the government's actors, and cannot be sharply distinguished from them. Three distinct ordering principles or modes of governance can be identified within these relationships: hierarchical rules, market exchanges, and shared values. Any actual policy, programme or organisation involves a mix of modes. Governance as a coordination approach provides a framework for understanding the role of the private sector, nongovernment organisations, and the state in development.

Despite various classifications of the definition of good governance, in general good governance has accountability, transparency, openness, and rule of law as its basic components (Bhatta, 1998:232). It entails a vast set of democratic processes and institutions at every level of society, from the local council to regional, national and international institutions, that ideally allow the voices of the people to be heard, conflicting interests to be peacefully resolved and a forging of consensus towards greater social progress (Wijkman, 1998:2).

Good governance aims for more than merely efficient management of economic and financial resources, or particular public services. Rather it encompasses a broad reform strategy to strengthen the institutions of civil society and make government more open, responsive, accountable and democratic. Thus, in good governance the efficiency concerns of public management overlap with the issue of accountability of institutions involved in governance (Minogue et al., 1998:6).

The universality of the aim of good governance in supporting democracy and human rights raises the significant issues of the applicability and the achievement of good governance in diverse countries. International development agencies are criticised for being unaware of structural and cultural differences between developed and developing countries and also among and within developing countries (Roots, 1996; Alcantara,

1998). The concept of governance was coined in the North by international development agencies based on Western experiences of development. The OECD document reflects the promotion of the universality of a Western model of development, lacking reference to the recent experience of contemporary Asia (Roots, 1996). The inability to distinguish between regime type and good governance reduces the document's applicability to Asia where good governance thrives amidst political diversity (Roots, 1996: 146). Thus, good governance is perceived as the imposition of Western values on governance which is likely to fail if it is to be implemented in developing countries. Minogue (2002:135) explains the failure of good governance as follows:

On current evidence it seems likely that good governance will also fail as a universalizing project, representing as it does the attempted imposition of a Western model at a time when globalizing tendencies are producing a world in which the economic power of Western countries is increasingly under challenge, and their cultural values are increasingly at odds with those of other societies.

The Western concept differentiates between and separates, strong and weak states. Thus good governance supposedly occurs when the state retrenches, becomes less powerful, assumes a low profile and operates in a network with private interests and groups as a partner scarcely more important than others (Merrien, 1998:58). In the realm of developing countries, especially in Asia, the division is blurred. In East Asia there is a strong but limited government (Roots, 1996; Kiely, 1998). A strong state which is accountable and responsive to the people - 'a socially progressive state that receives its visions and strength from the principles of a popular or inclusive democracy in which a division of power has been negotiated that allows many development problems to be managed by decentralized units of governance in cooperation with the people themselves, organized in their own communities and popular organizations' (Brohman, 1996:275-276). Cases from East Asia suggest that states are strong when critical and durable limits channel government's behaviour into activities compatible with economic development (Root, 1996:141-143). The combination of weak and strong state usually emerges as the successful model of governance in Asia. Hence, the Western notion of good governance is inadequate in explaining the East Asian stories of 'failure' and 'success' since it has been based on the 'flawed neoliberal paradigm'

which perceives state as an inefficient actor of development and has thus reduced development to a simple process of technical policy making (Kiely, 1998:63).

The African perspective on governance also criticises the universality of good governance (Kruiter, 1996; Nzomo, 2001). The North imposing their notions of good governance with an emphasis on accountability and transparency, is considered as being neglectful and derogatory toward the images of African culture and government since it perceives dishonesty (in the form of corruption) among the Africans as the root of development problems in Africa. From the African perspective inefficiency in development processes in Africa is more of a problem of incompetencies (capability mobilisation and capacity building) which is inseparable from the past experiences of Western colonialism. The Northern concept of good governance is also considered as reducing problems of development to merely management issues. It argues that governance is historically contingent, therefore, governance should be separated from the notion of goodness. Good governance should be placed in its historical context. The notion of governance should be based on community or group with an emphasis on balance over rights and duties rather than on individual rights. Competency and incentive would be elements of good governance together with accountability. The African perspective on governance urges that 'another governance' which places equal emphasis on the role of the state and civil society and their interaction is needed (Kruiter, 1996).

Another insight put forward by Alcantara (1998) involves criticising the tendency of international financial institutions to use the term governance rather than 'state reform' and 'political change' to avoid severe criticisms for undermining the sovereignty of aid recipient countries. Technical rather than social and political considerations have been used in implementing these institutions' neoliberal economic programmes more efficiently (Alcantara, 1998:107). Alcantara continues that this focus on efficiency contributes to the difficulties faced by borrowing countries in implementing specific initiatives. The emphasis on promoting more efficient government institutions and on improving the capability of government creates the standardisation of models of

political institution building (Alcantara, 1998). The World Bank, she notes, has used the concept of good governance in relation to a purely technocratic issue of governing which provides no analysis of the existence of vested interests within and outside the state. Thus it has neglected the political side of development.

Larmour (2000:8-9) argues that good governance is a blend of the universal and particular. Larmour specifically explains that 'although there are similarities of the state - a set of similar looking organisations, legislatures, departments, local governments which carry out a similar set of tasks -there is also country specificity in implementing governance since the meaning differs among countries'. Therefore Larmour suggests that middle level theories about good governance, between arguments for the universality of good governance and the peculiarity of countries, are needed in discussing good governance.

These critiques lead us to question the universal applicability of governance and good governance. The governance concept points to the creation of a structure or an order which cannot be externally imposed but is the result of the interaction of a multiplicity of governing and other influencing actors (Kooiman, 1993). As the consequence of governance as process which are determined by actors, who are bound and influenced by their social, political and historical environment, the definition of good governance should be sufficiently diverse to be responsive to different needs and concerns of different societies/groups, who define good governance for themselves. This concept of good governance should be defined and applied within the specific history and social context of the society in which the concept is being implemented. The concept, strategies and methods of good governance should be derived from and based on local knowledge, circumstances and experiences.

Several reasons can be proposed in arguing for the urgency to relate the interpretation of governance and good governance to the diversity of the national and local environments within countries. Social values and histories of countries are diverse. There are particular conditions in developing countries that may contribute to the

inappropriateness of implementing models of governance and good governance which derive from Western countries. Good definitions of good governance must therefore be sensitive to, and acknowledge, the diversity of nations. The concept of good governance cannot be perceived and implemented as universal ideas with universal application. It must be adjusted to 'concrete social settings' in diverse countries (Alcantara, 1998:113).

More attention and emphasis need to be given to the political/cultural aspect of good governance such as the strengthening of the capacity of community organisations (civil society) that look more at the involvement of the society in governing rather than merely focusing on enhancing the technocratic capacity of government as applied by international development agencies in promoting good governance. Larmour (2000) also found that a government's performance may depend as much on civic associations as on institutional design; simple, incremental reforms that are consistent with policymakers' values are easier to transfer; policies adopted by developing countries are vulnerable to reversal at many subsequent points, depending on whether resistance erupts in the public arena, or remains within the bureaucracy (Larmour, 2000:12).

These critiques raise significant issues for good governance which need to be explored in examining the applicability of good governance in developing countries. These concerns relate to: universality, ethical issues regarding the sovereignty of countries with their norms, values and historical experiences (qualitative aspect of good governance); and debates on management/technocratic and political aspects of development. Governance needs are based upon embedded values and norms of the people. The concepts of governance and good governance as the measurement of governance should be anchored locally, based on local knowledge and norms in order to best serve the needs and interests of the people. This critique needs to be elaborated upon from a gender perspective if the good governance aim of enhancing popular participation and influence in all aspects of development is to be achieved.

Exploring Governance and Local Governance from a Gender Perspective

The concept of governance suggests the need for transformation of interactions between government and society based on participation, transparency, accountability and human rights. Thus, it offers participatory and accountable management of society. However, gender and governance, which both emerge in political debates on the role of women in society and in governing, are terms that have contested meanings and are politically loaded. Yet, the assumption of gender neutrality of governance and government institutions contributes to the neglect of gender in governance debates. In fact, governance is not gender neutral. Governance institutions have the tendency to be more responsive to men's interests. Although not publicly acknowledging gender differences, government structures and processes reproduce gender inequality (Lahti and Kelly, 1995; Goetz, 1997; Scott, 1999; Taylor, 2000; Bhatta, 2001). Governance has been defined in favour of men in control of social and political institutions. Norms in governance are formed by males and tend to serve their interests (Bhatta, 2001). Thus, gender is crucial in understanding the construction of governance and local governance.

The existing debate on governance is yet to address gender equity adequately. Whilst discussions on governance focus on how to 'get institutions right for development', strategies to make the institutions right for women in development are rarely addressed (Goetz, 1997). The emphasis on the formal and instrumental concepts of power and participation contributes to the neglect of women in governance. As Prins (1993:85) argues:

The governing and governance of the question of emancipation has [sic] been reduced to choices of pursuing sector and integrated policy in instrumental terms. This provides an explanation of why emancipation policy has turned out to be insufficiently effective so far. It is the consequence of the lack of a strategy which operates both from the inside out and from the outside in.

While in the 1990s feminists attempted to include feminist concerns in good governance discussions (Molyneux, 2001:196), gender aspects of local governance remained ignored. It is interesting to note that despite their strong argument for the significance of locality to women's lives and empowerment, feminists tend to neglect local governance

as a crucial focus in discussing development. The importance of the local level and both gender concerns and good local governance began to attract attention in the “Earth Summit” in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, which focused on sustainable development. By recognising local government representatives as members of national delegations, this summit perceived local government as partners and not merely as an extension of the hand of central government (IULA, 2001).

However, while emphasising the crucial role of women in power and decision-making and institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 ignored the significance of women and perceived local governance as equal to NGOs. It was during the Second UN Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II, Istanbul 1996), in which the representatives of local government were coordinated by the International Union of Local Authorities (IULA), that both local government and the UN Commission on Human Settlements declared their commitment to address gender equity since it is critical in human settlement management.

A significant step towards the recognition of the importance of gender equity for local government and development was the issuance of the IULA Worldwide Declaration on Women in Local Government in 1998 which was launched as a Local Beijing Declaration in which local governments stated their commitment to work towards gender equality. This declaration, which was presented to the UN Commission on the Status of Women (Beijing +5 PrepCom II) in March 1999 and to the Beijing Review Conference in June 2000, has been ratified by 106 organisations in 29 countries including - 23 national associations on behalf of all their local government members. It facilitates the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action by calling for gender equality in local government policy and decision making, employment and service provision is raising awareness and putting the rights of women on the agenda of local councils (IULA, 2001).

The next critical question that needs to be asked in exploring the significance of local governance to women is whether or not decentralisation, which is the devolution of power from the central government to the local government, will foster women's empowerment at the local level.

Decentralisation

The relevance of women's roles and needs to local government functions is frequently considered as the basis for the argument in favour of the affinity between women and local government (Philips, 1996; Stoker, 1996; Halford et al., 1997). This argument is based on the assumption that women are more likely to engage in politics at the local level, or more likely to concern themselves with the kinds of decisions that are made in their local environment. Women are considered as effective change agents at the local level because of their strong views and invaluable suggestions in local processes which derive from their intimate knowledge of local and neighbourhood problems (Beal, 1997). Philips (1996) more specifically describes the affinity between women and local government as follows:

1. Division of function between central and local government in which the functions delegated to the locality have come to overlap quite remarkably with traditional areas of female concern.
2. An additional correlation between women and community action which suggests that local politics is more open to women as activists as well as to women as elected representatives.

Moreover, local government-elected offices are perceived as more accessible to women because of their locality and part time nature (Philips, 1996; Pringle and Watson, 1998).

So, will devolving more power to local government enhance women's access to local resources and enhance the performance of local government? Decentralisation has been argued as important in realising both the democratic and efficiency values of local government (Beetham, 1996; Blair, 2000; Osmani, 2002). It suits the efficiency value since it allows the utilisation of local knowledge in solving local problems and determining service delivery which better serves local preferences. Decentralisation is

also democratic since it provides greater opportunity for diverse segments of the population to express and fight for their preferences (Osmani, 2002). In order for decentralisation to serve both efficiency and democracy value of local government it must be accompanied by conditions that are characteristic of participatory approaches, such as the building up of confidence among the various actors, including women, through dialogue and responsiveness, and readiness to share power and to combine local resources with administrative resources and procedures (Schneider and Libercier, 1995:12).

Feminist politics, therefore, supports decentralisation which transfers more power from central government to local government since it will bring politics closer to home (Hadenius and Uglu, 1996; Philips, 1996; Mauclay, 1998; Molyneux, 2001), while at the same time help in shifting the balance between women and men by providing enough power and opportunity conducive to ensuring transformation at the local level (Philips, 1996), as described below:

The local arena is a hybrid one, poised between community and the state, private and public, the household and the town hall, and thus offers a cross-over space for women just as the process of decentralisation is throwing up hybrid agencies and social actors, blurring boundaries between private and public sector, elected and non-elected bodies (Mauclay 1998:105).

The transfer of power from the central government to local government provides a site for women to represent their interests and needs by entering the arena of local politics. Rejecting the increase of central government control over local government expenditure, and the privatisation of public services, many women become involved in local government as a significant site of resistance and reaction (Pringle and Watson, 1998). Local government is considered as providing more space and opportunities for women to represent their needs and interests than central government.

On the other hand, the threat of locality to women's lives cannot be ignored in discussing the affinity between women and local government. Local communities are not always democratic and they may frequently resist changes. Some argue that local structures are less amenable to change than are higher levels of political organisation

(Teune, 1995; Hadenius and Ugla, 1996; Philips, 1996). Local communities frequently resist or subvert changes brought about by national governments and international bodies, especially when they consider the changes as threatening to the traditional norms and structures that have served their interests. At this point, the locality of local government may obstruct attempts at reversing patterns of women's subordination at the local level. Along with the increasing competition over power and resources, the devolution of power to local authorities may marginalise women through the domination of the stronger groups over local power and resources (Byrne and Laier, 1996).

Decentralisation may be conducive to participation as a general condition for participation, yet it is not enough to realise gender equity. Decentralisation trends in the Philippines, for example, have increased popular participation (the strengthening of civil society) but have been less encouraging to the achievement of women as the local elected positions consist of only 10 percent women. Women are more actively involved in advocacy groups focusing on equity for women (Rosario, 1997:83-86). Also, while participation may increase representation of women, it does not automatically empower women. Blair's (2000) study on decentralisation in six developing countries reveals that, even with the existence of affirmative action, women are still marginalised in all processes of local government especially in benefiting from development at the local level and in reducing poverty. This study suggests that special efforts, such as reserving seats for women and minorities, are important in extending the participation of these marginalised groups since they tend to be excluded from the corridors of power and formal processes in local governance (Blair, 2000). Thus, women's inclusion and gender equity are crucial in ensuring that decentralisation works efficiently and democratically for the betterment of both women and men as stakeholders in local governance:

The systematic integration of women augments the democratic basis, the efficiency and the quality of the activities of local government. If local government is to meet the needs of both women and men, it must build on the experiences of both women and men, through equal representation at all levels and in all fields of decision-making, covering the wide range of responsibilities

of local governments (Article 11: IULA Worldwide Declaration on Women in Local Government, 1998).

The significance of decentralisation and local governance in empowering women, however, is influenced by the political environment of the country, the dynamics of bureaucracy at the local level and the interaction among various actors at the local level, as will be explained in the following section.

Gendered dynamics of local government

The centralised characteristics of local government in Asia - which function primarily to maintain law and order and revenue extraction rather than participation at the local level - have been described as the legacy of Western colonialism (UNESCAP, 1998; and Gonzales III and Bhatta, 1998). According to Robinson (2000) traditional culture in the form of patriarchal society which is strengthened by colonisers has evolved into male-dominated governance. In these male-dominated government institutions and cultures, government policy and agendas rarely incorporate a gendered understanding of policies and implementation of programmes. Despite the emergence of democratic institutions and processes at the local level, both the domination by elites and the exclusion of marginalised groups, including women, have become the pattern of local governance in Asia (Robinson, 1999). The case of women working within the state in the Philippines reveals the resilience of state masculinism: budget constraints, male attitude, absence of a gender specific database stem from assumption of the similarity of men's and women's experiences (Rosario, 1997:83-86). Even in the midst of the existence of the femocrats (women who work in local government bureaucracy and strive for women's interests) and feminists councillors as is the case in London's governance, initiatives to equalise women and to integrate women's needs and interests into governance are prone to rejections and challenges from other units. Along with the cutbacks of local government since the 1980s, in 1994 only two women's committees still existed and they functioned marginally (Abrar et al., 1998:155).

Based on a collection of recent research on governance and reform issues in the South Pacific, Larmour (2000) identifies the exclusion of women from elected office, and declining provincial budgets for health services as meaning that women were less likely to survive than men. In general, problems of governance in Asia involve: concentration of political power, lack of democratic accountability and the more recent impact of the processes of globalisation.

An exploration of the organisational forms, culture and social relations of local government is crucial in examining the performance of local government in equalising gender relations at the local level. Through the gendered nature of organisations, women experience a double oppression in which as subordinates they are subject to bureaucratic regulation of their behaviour, and as women they are excluded as equal organisational participants by patriarchal structures and processes.

Based on their study of several developing countries, Byrne and Laier (1996) point to a number of factors which explain the marginalisation of women in local government:

1. Isolation and lack of support for women in entering local government. Women are not treated on an equal footing with men, thus, women experience discrimination when entering local government.
2. By entering local government women experience conflict between their domestic obligations and public duties.
3. This conflict contributes to the transformation of women into 'sociological males' through divorce, childlessness and other factors which separate them from experiencing gender divisions of labour, and thus women's practical needs, in the same way as the majority of women they represent.
4. These women are frequently reluctant to raise gender issues because they have to adapt themselves to dominant behaviour and priorities.
5. Women involved in local government usually come from the middle-class. The rigid political hierarchies require certain skills which poorer women lack, thus limiting the access of these women to local government. Women in local government protect their interests, which resemble the interests of middle-class rather than poorer women.

6. Lack of experience, equal recognition and support from their male colleagues may constrain the effectiveness of women involved in local government from promoting gender equity.

The gendered dynamics of local government structures and cultures contribute to difficulties in implementing positive changes for women (Halford, 1992; Ramsay and Parker, 1992). In his study, Little (1994) found local governments were ignorant of women's needs and there was hostility towards women's initiatives. Based on an organisational culture approach, Halford (1992) points out two general processes of organisational resistance to change within local government:

1. Empire building, which means competition between departments. This was widely cited as a major problem for women's initiatives. This may have multiple causes such as competition for limited resources in funding, or career strategies of managers within particular departments. Building up the size and responsibilities of a department increases opportunities for career development. Through empire building managers increase their power, control and status. Departments are resistant to intervention by the centrally located women's unit since, an empire is under construction, demands from central government that it be built differently are not welcome. The weakening of a women's unit through the empire building process is strengthened by the nature of the nonprofessional status of women's officers.

2. Bureaucratic inertia, in which organisations are noted for their security and stability of work functions. Whilst the routine of bureaucratic functions may be one explanation for bureaucratic inertia, the widespread gendered attitudes and values in local government institutions reinforce organisational inertia.

Women working within bureaucracy use many strategies in their struggle to survive in this gendered environment. Hester Eisenstein (1989, 1991, cited in Witz and Savage, 1992:39-40) identifies three categories of feminist intervention in bureaucracy:

- 'bureaucratic-individual' intervention, where women enter the bureaucracy of state or national government at a policy-making level as self-identified feminists.

- ‘bureaucratic-structural’ intervention, where women create new structures within government or university administrations specifically designed to benefit women (such as women’s policy units, women’s studies programmes, or ministries for women’s affairs).
- Other forms of feminist political intervention are ‘legal reform’ through legislative change, ‘political participation in a leadership role’, but in non-feminist political parties or trade unions as a self-proclaimed feminist, and ‘alternative structures’ where feminists create independent organisations outside existing political and administrative structures.

Criticising the inadequacy of representation in explaining women’s realities and struggles at the local level, Grant and Tancred (1992) argued for the concept of ‘dual unequal representation’ as more capable of explaining the persistent gender subordination in organisations. Dual unequal representation views gender inequality in the state’s bureaucracy as being ensured both through the relatively powerless position of the units that allegedly represent women’s issues and through the relatively positions of women who serve in other branches and departments of state.

Potentials and Problems of Affirmative Action for Women in Asia

Participation as the major premise of local government is another vexedly debated area concerning the magnitude of local government in improving women’s condition. Feminist perspectives reject the concept of women’s participation in local government as deriving from the similarity of local government’s function with women’s traditional obligations since, as Philips (1996:112) argues ‘...greater accessibility for women’s participation may also be taken as homeliness or subordination of women’. Women’s political activities which evolve around consumption issues devalue women’s role in local government since they strengthen the dichotomy of public and private. Moreover, as feminists who opposed gender-specific statutes also noted, various protections for women and representation of women through one set of isolated weak structures which focus only on women’s issues made women more expensive, and often sidelined them from any jobs desirable to male competitors, thus creating incentives for covert discrimination (Grant and Tancred, 1992; Rhode, 1998).

Despite differences in cultural and political systems, and in governments' strategies, women are continuously marginalised in decision-making processes (UNESCAP, 1998; Gonzales III and Bhatta, 1998). A recent comparative study on the position of women in local government in thirteen countries in Asia and the Pacific, which was prepared for the UN Economic and Social Commissions for Asia and Pacific, highlights that women, who are at present 52% of the world's population, are grossly underrepresented in the decision-making and governance processes of local communities. The percentage of women in local government seats in these countries ranged from 33.3% in India and Bangladesh, to a low of 2% in Srilanka (UNESCAP, 2002).

Affirmative action through the reservation of seats for women at the local level which aims at increasing women's representation to a certain level has positively encouraged and increased women's political participation. The implementation since 1988 of the National Perspective Plan for Women in India, which recommends a 30 per cent quota for women not only in the *panchayats* but also in *panchayat-raj*¹ leadership, contributed to greater women's political participation while at the same time providing space for women to struggle for the fulfilment of their needs (Rai, 1999). A study on Nepal, while generally critical of the decentralisation process, also acknowledges that mandatory reservation of seats for women has facilitated much greater representation of women than would otherwise have been possible. The study also notes that while the elite classes still dominate politics in Nepal, the weaker classes have gained better representation at the level of local governance compared to the national level (Osmani, 2002:16).

Affirmative action significantly contributes to an increased percentage of women being elected to local government seats. An UNESCAP report shows there is larger percentage of women elected in local government where there are policies that reserve

¹ *Panchayat raj* refers to local government in India which is divided into three structures: village level, block level and district level, which vary across the state in India.

seats for women, as in South Asia, than compared to Southeast Asia where there is no reservation policy. Besides the adoption of reserve seats for women local governments in South Asia are more supportive of women by providing training, venues and other programmes to enhance women's participation in local government (UNESCAP, 2002: 5-7). The Philippines is the exceptional case in Southeast Asia since this country obligates 30% reservation for women in the *barangay*² and in all mandatory consultations within local and central government. Moreover, since 1996, the local governments and all government agencies have been obligated to allocate 5% of their budget to addressing gender issues (UNESCAP, 2002: 5-7). This affirmative policy resulted in a higher percentage of women in local government in the Philippines than in other Southeast Asian countries.

Women representatives in the city council is one indicator of good local governance. Therefore the presence of various affirmative actions for women is crucial in increasing women's participation at the local level. Special measures are needed in favour of groups such as women that suffer discriminatory treatment. Without them, women will continue to be marginalised because they will lack autonomy and voice (Vagliani, 1995).

It is also interesting to note that in the presence of reservation seats for women, the percentage of women elected at the local level is higher than at the national level: in India 33.3% women are elected at the local level compared to 7.9% at the national level, Bangladesh has 33.3% and 11.2% for local and national levels respectively, and Philippines 16.5% at the local level and 12.8% at the national level. In countries where there is no reservation seat policy for women, the percentage of women to be elected as representatives is higher at the national than local level: Thailand has 6.7% and 7.8%, and Malaysia 9.8% and 14.1% for local and national levels respectively (UNESCAP, 2002).

² *Barangay* is the lowest unit of government in Philippines.

Notwithstanding the possibility of cooptation of women's participation, the representation of women in local government and in representative bodies at the local level provides an entry point for the incorporation of women's interests into local governance. Despite criticisms regarding the achievements of local government women's committees, their existence in the midst of the frequently gendered bureaucracy at the local level, as mentioned above, may benefit women. The existence of women in public office has both symbolic and practical values ranging from legitimising women's voices to their becoming role models in inspiring women to engage in local government. Considering the struggle women's committees face, Edwards (1995) more specifically points out that by providing support for women's demands within the political system, women's committees have contributed to making women more visible and audible and sometimes even enhancing women's capability in changing decisions. Through these committees, women learn their way around the system and so are empowered to use it to benefit themselves and their groups. By cooperating with women working within local government, women's advocacy organisations may find access to policy-making arenas, thus helping to advance women's political agendas. The ways this cooperation works are to pursue women's interests through directly recruiting organisations' leaders into policy networks or by forging alliances with relatively powerful and well-organized society-wide actors.

Women working within local government may also indirectly help to promote women's interests by 'providing opportunities and resources to groups and individuals outside of the state to allow them to participate in policy formulation and implementation, and by providing state funds to organisations involved with policies that advance women's status, or by inviting women experts, activists, and / or representative from feminist associations into state arenas of policy making' (Stetson and Mazur, 1995:276). Local government women's committees in developed European countries, which are defined by their policy and action rather than their form, benefit women by promoting equality, by trying to change policy and by endeavouring to shift public resources (Edwards, 1996).

A UNDP (2000:16) report on women's political participation argues that it has contributed in producing 'family – friendly policies' which facilitates the combining of employment in the job market with their respective family commitments such as parental leave, and reproductive rights by both women and men. Despite a diversity of policies, strategies and mechanisms for women's empowerment in local government across Asia and the Pacific, women working in local government in this region argue that their involvement in local government has a transformative leadership effect and that their agendas and style are different from those of their male colleagues. Women perceive that they have a greater sense of issues which are relevant to women's interests such as: the well-being and welfare issues of the community (such as housing, sanitation, education, children, etc.), the environment, with emphasis on harmony between culture and art and environment, quality of life; priorities on family issues, domestic violence against women and children issues, as well as dowry; and a more democratic and transparent approach to governance (UNESCAP, 2002: 5-7).

However, achieving gender equity in representation has always been a complex and painful process. Even with the existence of affirmative action women in developing countries still experience difficulties in gaining seats in local government. Notwithstanding diversity among women in developing countries, cultural and structural issues have been major obstructions to women in realising gender equity in representation at the local level. Culture and traditions which perceive women's primary role and responsibility as being based in the home are the main barriers which sometimes make women vulnerable (UNESCAP, 2000; Ofei-Aboagye, 2000; UNESCAP, 2002).

Perceptions of politics as male, and as a dirty area and women's perceived lack of knowledge and interests in the processes and structures of local government strengthen the marginalisation of women in local governance. Besides these obstructions, poverty and illiteracy play an important role in obstructing women's participation in local governance (Narayanan, 2002:295). Also, the high cost involved in attending elections

obstructs women's achievement in competing in them. In Sri Lanka, for example, during the period 1991-1997, the already marginal representation of women dropped even lower because of intertwined factors such as women's reluctance to compete with men of different political parties, the expensive nature of the present system of proportional representation, and a cultural background where women are reluctant to be involved in conflicting political situations (UNESCAP, 2000). A study on India showed that a variety of reasons that include the existence of vested interest groups, lack of party support, the criminalisation of politics, women's lack of mobility, education and resources have obstructed the enhancement of women's political participation (Narayanan, 2002:295). Other concerns about the significance of reserving seats for women, as in the case of South Asia, is that marginal groups - including women - remain at the bottom of local government agendas since local government is mostly dominated by upper and powerful castes (UNESCAP, 1998).

The interlocking of private and public patriarchy in Third World countries increases the complexity of achieving gender equity through reservation seats at the local level. Walby (1996) uses private and public patriarchy to distinguish dimensions and sites of patriarchy which have exploited women. Private patriarchy occurs in the household where men, whether as fathers or husbands, directly and individually control and oppress women for their own benefits. Restrictions preventing women from entering the public sphere are used to maintain women's subordination. In public patriarchy, women are not restricted from entering the public sphere, but they are subordinated within public arenas. Men, collectively rather than individually, exploit women (Walby, 1996:5-20). In Third World countries, it is difficult to separate private and public patriarchy since they frequently interlock in subordinating women. For example, in the case of Tamil Nadu, the achievement of state policy in empowering women through reserved seats for women has been obstructed by the interlocking of private and public patriarchy:

The failure of the state to endow women with economic and social entitlements, and a state bureaucracy which is trapped within a patriarchal worldview, are both reasons for the lack of active participation by women in local structures of governance...The non-state domain often achieves this [obstructs women's

participation] by locking together private and public patriarchies, and by bringing into play cast and class powers (Anandhi, 2002:453).

The complexity of intertwining factors which obstruct women in equalising processes at the local level means that measurements frequently used in addressing women's issues through the improvement in women's representation, such as reserved seats, is inadequate in ensuring women's effective participation or in ensuring that women's interests are considered in the policy and programmes of local government. This measurement should be accompanied by additional measures such as awareness raising, training programmes for female candidates and representatives, the cultivation of links and networks between women working within local government and women in NGOs, and the timing of meetings and provision of childcare to fit in with women's schedules (Byrne and Laier, 1996).

Interactions and relationships between women's movements outside government bodies with women working from within determine successes in engendering local governance. Cases of engendering local governance reveal that transforming the agenda of local government cannot rely solely on women working within local/national government, but depends also on a constant and constructive relationship between women working in bureaucracy and grassroots women's collectives (Rosario, 1997; Mauclay, 1998; SSP, 1999). Structures and mechanisms, such as decentralisation procedures, are required at the local level to ensure consultation with women's organisations and that women's needs and interests are taken into account in policy decisions and the allocation of resources. In order to ensure local level implementation of gender policies and to increase accountability of service provisions to women, gender units or women's committees within local government are required. Along with these strategies, local level bodies which invite participation from civil society organisations should ensure that they include representation from women's organisations and ensure that participating institutions take measures to increase female representation and voice in their organisations (Byrne and Laier, 1996). The comparison between Chile and Brazil suggested that political parties which are committed to gender equality and initiatives from local communities, such as in Brazil, are more successful in empowering women

than is the imposition of a central government programme by the Chile government (Mauclay, 1998). Experiences of several countries in Latin America reveal that the increasing participation of civil society and the deepening of democracy are crucial components in altering the political terrain to be more accessible to women in participating in - as well as determining - local government agendas. In Brazil, the Worker's Party through direct and indirect strategies provides new spaces for women as political subjects. It responded to women's practical and strategic needs by decentralising municipal services, and a gender-alert approach to city planning including commitment to desegregate the city (Mauclay, 1998). Whenever political parties are committed to gender equality and the implementation of initiatives from local communities, and collaborate with NGOs, the church and well-organised feminist groupings, such as is the case in Brazil, then local government will provide an entry point for women's empowerment.

Prins (1993) points out that this interaction provides women with room for manoeuvre in which options and constraints to action are determined by organisational structures and the political climate. Analysing the case of women's emancipation in the Netherlands she argues for strategies which focus more on strengthening the relationship between women inside and outside government. Since too much attention has been given to institutional questions on emancipating women, strategies aimed at strengthening the interaction between women's movements and policy makers should also become crucial means in empowering women.

Conclusion

Despite diverse definitions of governance, there seems to be an agreement that good governance means the involvement of women and men not only in implementation of development programmes but most importantly in decision making processes. In other words, participation in local governance means both active involvement as well as control by both women and men in determining local government agendas. Good governance, with its emphasis on civic engagement and participation, can only be

properly understood with reference to the prevailing constructions of gender (Beal, 1998; Bhatta, 1998).

Since women are diverse in their interests and needs, all parties involved in women's empowerment should have concepts of governance and good governance which are sensitive to this diversity. The imposition of a Western version of good governance as a condition in giving aid to a national government, for example, will result in the ignorance of the local context since the national government will impose this version on local governments. Local governments then also impose this at their level, thus ignoring the specificity of women's needs in policy making. A definition of good governance must take into account the social, historical, cultural and political diversity among nations and also be sensitive to the diversity of needs within groups and between individuals in any location, with gender equity standing high on the governance agenda.

Local governance, thus, is about not only formal process and structures but also informal processes and spaces, in which actors and factors interact with each other in their daily lives. At this point, 'a consciously political approach which views local government as a site of political action with the state at the local level rather than a technocratic, bureaucratic, managerial or welfarist approach which strategically placed conduits of welfare policy aimed at family and community is more beneficial in approaching local government' (Mauclay, 1998:105). As Philips (1996:128) succinctly argues 'any politics that seeks to subvert existing agendas will get its first breaks at the local level'.

Exploration of the concepts of participation, power and empowerment from a gender perspective will enable us to view local governance as a locus of struggle for women at the local level in redefining political agendas of development. This issue is the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

PARTICIPATION, POWER AND EMPOWERMENT: BASIC COMPONENTS OF GENDER-SENSITIVE LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Introduction

Interactions between and within government bureaucracy with components of civil society hold the key to understanding the achievement of engendering local governance. Participation is one way through which the society may interact with government and play a key role in governance. This chapter explores interactions between women, local government and civil society organisations based on concepts of participation and empowerment. It will focus on the interplay between participation, power and empowerment in order to understand gender inequality in local governance and the complexity of enhancing women's capabilities in influencing the local development process. In this chapter I will discuss what kind of power relations emerge from such interaction and what impacts it has on women's empowerment at the local level. The concepts of power, participation and empowerment are crucial in unravelling the roots of gender inequity in local governance. In this chapter I will also argue that analysis of women's agency is central in discussing gender and local governance since it allows for the emergence of women as active stakeholders in local governance as they creatively use diverse strategies and spaces in struggling to participate in local governance.

Because of the dynamic power relations at the local level, gender relations are significant in discussing local governance since the concepts of community participation and empowerment do not automatically mean that women have been included in local governance. Therefore, this chapter will first explore the concepts of participation, power and empowerment in community organising and local governance, then discuss these concepts from a gender perspective. It will then discuss gender mainstreaming which the state uses as a strategy for engendering local governance. The final section of this chapter is about local politics and women's empowerment and which discusses

alternative strategies women at the grassroots level use in deconstructing gendered processes at the local level.

Participation and Empowerment in Local Governance

Participation has always been central in discussions on local government in Western liberal democracy. Liberal democracy has long viewed participation as the devolution of power which is a significant instrument in making and maintaining democracy to work (Burns et al., 1994; Snyder, 1995; Beetham, 1996). Participation has several significant 'societal values' since it allows each citizen the right to influence governmental decision making, revitalises democracy, maintains the stability of society, guards public interest, and reduces alienation of the individual (Frank et al., 1979:555-556).

Participation in public domains can be differentiated between community, political and citizen participation (Gaventa and Valderama, 1999). In the 1980s development literature and practice, the concept of participation refers to community participation with regard to service delivery. Participation was seen as a key to greater effectiveness and sustainability of projects (McGee, 2002:104). Since the 1990s participatory development approaches have included participation at all levels of development projects or programmes, from identification through to implementation and on to monitoring and evaluation. In this kind of community participation beneficiaries ideally take control over the development process and use it in fulfilling their needs and improving their welfare (Brohman, 1996:251).

The focus of the participation debate then altered from community development projects to policy, governance and institutional concepts (McGee, 2002:112). Political participation involves the interaction between state, community organisations and individuals in influencing political decision making through direct and indirect participation such as representation and voting. Citizen participation includes political and community participation through direct and indirect mechanisms in influencing and exercising control in governance (Gaventa and Valderama, 1999).

Popular participation and accountability are major grounds in democratic local governance which enhance both the responsiveness of processes of governance to the people and the effectiveness in service delivery (Plein et al., 1998; Blair, 2000). At this point, local government is increasingly pointed out as an ideal site for increasing community participation. Notwithstanding the problems arising from its structure, local government is perceived as providing more participative structures than those of central government agencies by providing people with the opportunity to participate in decision making (Mohan and Stokke, 2000). Thus, empowerment can be seen as one of the prime tasks of local government (Burns et al., 1994).

Literature on participation in the public sphere perceives participation as having diverse hierarchical types (Burns et al., 1994; Schneider and Liebcier, 1995; Weiss, 2000). In his study analysing citizen empowerment, Arnstein (1971 cited in Burns et al., 1994:155) identifies several levels of citizen participation ranging from nonparticipation (manipulation and therapy), to tokenism (information, consultation, and placation), to citizens' participation (partnership, delegated power and citizen control). While Arnstein's model refers to the relationship between citizens and government's specific programmes, Burns et al., (1994:194) develop a ladder of citizen participation in analysing local government and citizen empowerment based on spheres stakeholders are involved in: (1) the individual sphere; (2) the estate, neighbourhood and programme, site and policy sphere; (3) the local government and administration sphere; and (4) the sphere of national governance. Based on this model, the degree of empowerment which citizens experience may differ among individuals and spheres. While one may have a high degree of participation in one sphere, s/he may not experience the same degree of participation in other spheres. Considering that women are more frequently involved in the first two spheres than at the local government and national spheres, Burns' model of citizen participation is helpful in understanding the difficulties women face in participating in local governance and helps to bring women into the discussion by recognising the diverse level of spheres of citizen participation.

Peterman (2000:40-41) provides a useful critique to this ladder of participation by arguing for the centrality of one's political perspective in determining the likelihood of empowerment through citizen participation. From a conservative point of view, empowerment is aimed at maximising individual control and ownership while limiting government's involvement. For the Liberal, empowerment should take the form of delegated power and a sharing of power as well as control between government and the community - while for the Left empowerment is realised through citizen control. Despite their differences, both Neo-Liberalist and post-Marxists share their belief that equality and welfare should not be put only on states and markets, rather they depend on exchanges of power between community, market and government. Thus participation and empowerment become key concepts in local government (Mohan and Stokke, 2000).

Processes and concepts of participation are both politically loaded and multidimensional. Whilst conceptually participation is considered as a major premise for local governance to be effective and to serve the interests of the people, in its implementation it can be manipulated to serve the interests of local government. Experiences from developed countries highlight the use of participation as political cooptation by local government, while in developing countries participation is used in mobilising the contribution of the community in the form of labour (Nelson and Wright, 1995:2-3). In developing countries participation in terms of empowerment is a complex process due to the problems that emerge in maintaining the balance between a community's autonomy and representation with government's power (Brohman, 1996). While participation in the context of mobilisation and extraction of community resources is allowed, the state tends to be more repressive if participation is to be extended to empowerment which implies sharing of power between local government and the community. Thus, it is one thing to discuss participation in terms of the sharing of the burden of development, and another thing to discuss participation as the sharing of power between the governed and government (Brohman, 1996).

Challenges to participation as empowerment also derive from power relations at the community level. For example, a study on the community participation of slum-dwellers in India revealed that in the midst of the presence of representative participatory institutions and government policies, which are intended to enhance community participation, the majority of slum-dwellers do not participate in decision making (Desai, 1996). While the community is involved in general meetings to make plans, it is the community leaders who get involved in decisionmaking. These leaders use the social control system ensuring the community accepts the decisions. Community leaders are frequently being used by state actors as communication channels between municipals and other sectoral government agencies. Thus, there is a paradox in participation in which more participation (representative institutions) means less participation (involvement in decision making). Another study on community participation in India found that the lower strata engage in and use more local political institutions, while the upper look at the higher level of government (Mitra, 1992:239). Based on this finding Mitra (1992: 229) argues that 'Allocation of developmental benefits in the local political arena is not the result of social dominance but is the outcome of a complex process based on bargaining and political competition, however imperfect'.

The rationale behind participation in local government is equity. Local politics provides room to manoeuvre for the marginalised. But does local government provide room for gender equity? Can it be used as an entry point for the advancement of women? Participation at the local level is influenced by the struggle for power among diverse stakeholders at the local level in which women constitute one group of stakeholders. Hence, power is critical in understanding and explaining women's position and roles in local governance. This will lead us to explore the meaning of power in relation to women's empowerment.

Defining Power

Power is 'a description of a relation, not a "thing" which people "have"' (Nelson and Wright, 1995:8). This definition of power resembles that of Foucault (cited in Ferguson

1990) which asserts that power is not a substance possessed and exercised by any person or institution conceived of as a 'powerful' subject. It is subjectless and is an apparatus consisting of discourse, institutions, actors and a flow of events. Thus, power is relational - which means it describes how people stand in relation to each other in everyday life.

Nelson and Wright (1995) propose three models of power - power over, power to and power with - which are useful in analysing different aspects of participation and empowerment. Power over involves gaining access to 'political' decision making, often in public forums. It views power relations as coercive, centred in institutions of government, although spilling over into wider structures of society. Under this model of power, empowering women then becomes threatening (Rowlands, 1998). In power to, participation is viewed as a process which can be worked at in order to enhance understanding of the capacity and knowledge that individuals have that can be used collectively to achieve shared goals (Nelson and Wright, 1995:8-10). Thus, power is both generative and transformative in the way that it may introduce and open up new possibilities while it does not have to be threatening to other individuals. Power with is the collective form of power. It assumes that women have more power collectively rather than they do individually.

Power relations, which include the distribution and dynamics of power, is at the heart in understanding the complexities of women's empowerment (Rowlands, 1997; Crawley, 1998). Power, as with participation, is not neutral. Rowlands (1998) argues that the neutrality of power, as implied in models of power, has obscured gender power dynamics and how this gender power dynamics can interact with others to produce complex power relationships. Thus Rowlands (1998:14) makes the strong argument that:

A feminist model of power would draw on the thinking of Foucault but would incorporate a gender analysis of power relations that includes an understanding of how "internalised oppression" places internal barriers to women's exercise of power, thereby contributing to the maintenance of inequality between men and women. It would also

draw on analysis of how the gendered phenomenon of male violence against women conditions women's experience.

Following Rowland's argument of the importance of understanding women's 'internalised oppression', it is essential to include an analysis of power relations at the household level since these power relations in the household significantly and intertwinedly influence power relations in the public sphere.

Household Power Relations

The household is an important level of analysis in engendering local governance. A very large proportion of any community live in households, and through daily interactions between its members the household becomes the central site where gender is continuously reproduced (Mckie et al., 1995; Morgan, 1999; Sommerville, 2000). Women's marginality in decisionmaking in communities is the logical consequence of their lack of power in household decisionmaking (Bhatta, 2001:25). In other words, '...debate about women's place in the household is actually a debate about women's place in society' (Glenn 1987 cited in Somerville, 2000:229). The civil societarian goes further in emphasising the centrality of the family as 'the cradle of citizenship which teaches standards of personal conduct that cannot be enforced by law, but which are indispensable traits for democratic civil society' (Fineman, 2000). Thus, 'Family relationships remain one of the major sites where gender gets done; gender is not incidental or formally irrelevant to family practices but, on the contrary, is built into these practices and routine understandings of them' (Morgan, 1999:29-30).

Much Western literature argues that households are the source of women's exploitation (Young, 1997; McKie et al., 1999:3). Liberal feminists put family in opposition to women's equality, since family was perceived as the cornerstone of patriarchy both as an ideology and as an economic and political system (Somerville, 2000:230). To explain this further, for many feminists the major obstacle to women's equality lies in the power differentials between women and men rooted in the family which will persist so long as the family does. As Somerville (2000:248) argues:

Men's power over women's confidence, self-esteem, material resources, time, priorities and behaviour within the family is paralleled by their control over women's opportunities and advancement in the workplace and in the public sphere more generally.

Based on this perception, women have been sacrificed for the benefits of other household members, the community and the state. Women's sacrifice can be seen as the basic component of development. The sustainability and comfort of household members are at the expense of women. Households benefit both state and society by making women carry the largest burden of the cost of development. Young (1997:134) explains the way the societal tasks are transferred to women as follows: 'Women serve, nurture, and maintain so that the bodies and souls of men and children gain confidence and subjectivity to make their mark on the world. This homey role deprives women of support for their own identity and projects'. Without the existence of women's contribution 'the costs of producing the goods and services presently being produced and consumed by humankind would be immeasurably higher' (Dominelli, 1991:267). 'Women's lifelong activities and identities outside the kitchen are determined and defined by their domesticity' (quoted in McKie et al., 1999:3). Therefore, women lost their identity by concentrating on servicing their husband and children. Since feminists view the kitchen 'as the symbol of women's domesticity, eliminating the family and gender roles it produces is crucial in transforming women's role to be equal to men' (McKie et al., 1999:3).

While liberal feminists perceive the household as the source of women's oppression since it persistently resists wider changes in the gendered divisions of labour as well as being a site for domestic violence and sexual oppression, cultural feminism, on the other hand, reveals the potential of household relations. Cultural feminism argues that 'mothering can be detached from the patriarchal form of motherhood, and become the basis for the creation of a female culture' (Rich 1976 cited in Somerville, 2000:183). Whilst on the one side supporting Irigaray and de Beauvoir on the household as the source of women's oppression, Young (1997:134) succinctly argues from a cultural feminist perspective:

Despite the oppressions and privileges the idea historically carries, the idea of home also carries liberating potential because it expresses uniquely human values. Some of these can be uncovered by exploring the meaning-making activity most typical of women in domestic work.

Household relations are significantly influenced by social expectations and social networks of household members (Mckie et al., 1999:6). Social expectations incorporate family relationships and the desires to create and live in a 'home'. These include expectations about appropriate day-to-day organisation and coordination of activities of household members and in particular the significance of 'shared' events such as meals, leisure in the home and entertaining outsiders (Mckie et al., 1999:6). Social networks, which are external activities of household members, determine household relations since they are often carried out with other members of the household, for other members of the household or in order to escape other members of the household. Hence, 'the household may also become a site for creative innovations of strategies and negotiations in challenging gendered practices and relationships, where women may put pressure on men, although this does not always means it is conflict free' (McKie et al., 1999:32). Through these negotiations women may find and exercise active survival strategies which can be used simultaneously to exercise limited social power. Concurring with this argument, I will argue that the household may interchangeably become the source of oppression as well as the site of struggle for women's empowerment to create their identity and to participate in local governance.

Gender Perspectives on Participation and Empowerment

From a gender perspective, participation and empowerment are interrelated concepts with complex and sometimes conflictual meanings. Therefore, it is important to distinguish between participation as a means (instrumental approach) and participation as an end (empowerment approach) (Moser, 1989; Gujit and Shah, 1998). When women are mobilised in order to achieve efficiency, effectiveness and cost recovery of a development programme, then participation is a means. Thus, it is 'when participation is perceived as an end, a process which will result in an increasingly meaningful

participation in all stages of development that participation will lead to empowerment' (Moser, 1993:100-101).

The condition and experiences, interests and needs of women which differ from those of male members of the community, contribute to women's different forms and levels of community participation. Thus, women engage in community participation differently from male members of the community. According to Beal (1996:9), women are usually involved in the community in two ways: 'whether they take up different issues which differ from men's interests, or take up similar issues with those of men but are interested in them in gendered ways'.

A study on the relationship between community participation, personal empowerment and gender in a low-income neighbourhood in Israel found gender-based differences in participating in the community and in ways in achieving empowerment (Itzhaky and York, 2000). Whereas men felt empowered in their participation as representatives, women felt they had greater control over services when they participated in decision making process. Women expressed their feelings of empowerment through personal and community control when they participated in organisational activities. Men preferred participating in formal forms of participation, such as being representatives, and being recognised by others while women placed little interest in gaining recognition from other and emphasised more the actual activities in terms of being service givers, community leaders or residents (Itzhaky and York, 2000).

While women have long been actively involved in community development, they are less visible in formal politics. Women's limited access to economic and financial resources at the household level influences their marginality in decision making at the household level and obstructs them from participating in public domains (UNDP, 2000; World Bank, 2000). The informality of structures used by women in participating has made women invisible in formal politics (Baden 2000:34). The limited participation of women in conventional politics is explained by Waylen (1996) as the result of their role in the private sphere along with the structures of formal politics such as the timing of

meetings, the harsh competition, and more widespread discrimination against women, for example in selection procedures. The higher cost for women to participate in formal politics, due to their domestic burdens and the gendered political culture, compared to benefits women gain strengthens the marginal participation of women in conventional politics (Waylen, 1996:12). Thus, there is neglect of how realities of women's heavy burden in the household impede their participation in formal politics. Interestingly, differing from cases in developed countries, Gleason (2001) finds that the nonexistence of government social care programmes for child care and the aged in India has motivated and increased women's political participation through which they hope to protect their interests and fulfil their domestic obligation.

Although participation is the major component of empowerment, participation alone does not guarantee the realisation of empowerment. If participation is perceived as being merely the contribution of women in carrying out development goals, then it will be disempowering to women. As Kabeer (1994:292) succinctly argues: 'It is only when the participation of poorer women goes beyond participation at the project level to intervening in the broader policy making agenda that their strategic interests can become an enduring influence on the course of development'. Even if participation is used an end, the neglect of the complexities of local structures and unequal relationships within groups in communities tends to divert the formulated goal of participation in empowering the community (Brohman, 1996:272). In order for women's participation to be empowering, it must transform the structures and processes to be more gender sensitive which will enable women by enhancing their accessibility to and control over resources at the local level (Baden, 2000:30).

Along with the changing development theories and approaches, the concept of empowerment provides attractive strategies for improving women's position in society. Yet problems arise because of diverse interpretations of the concept and its implementation, ranging from technical to more political concepts of empowerment. The technical concept of empowerment perceives empowerment as a 'multifaceted process involving the pooling of resources to achieve collective strength and

countervailing power, and entailing the improvement of manual and technical skills; administrative, managerial, and planning capacities; and analytical and reflective abilities of local people' (Brohman, 1996:265). This definition reduces empowerment to technical matter.

Empowerment, however, is not merely a technical issue – it is also political since it requires the transformation of unequal power relations which may also bring social and political conflict (Stein, 1997; Holland and Blackburn, 1998). It is a 'process of awareness and capacity building leading to greater participation, to greater decision-making power and control, and to transformative action' (Karl 1995:14). Stein (1997:70) views empowerment as 'a complex psychological and political concepts that represents both a cyclical small group process and outcome that is intended to help people to gain control of their lives and to improve their social, economic and political situations'. Thus, empowerment is a complex and slow process with transformation of unequal power relations as its ultimate objective.

Empowerment is both the process and the end since it includes both access to, and control of, resources and opportunities (Rowlands, 1997:139). According to Rowlands (1998:15) empowerment includes power over, power with, and power to, as identified by Nelson and Wright (1995) earlier in this chapter, but also power within. Empowerment, based on a gender perspective, should be perceived as 'the harnessed, self-generating power of women to act within their own interests' (Saunders, 2002:11). In Rowland's model of empowerment she recognises the diversity of empowerment regarding 'cultural, ethnic, historical and economic, geographic, political and social location; out of an individual's place in the life specific experience and out of the interaction of all the above with gender relations prevailing in society' (Rowlands, 1997:129). Rowlands' concept of personal and collective empowerment provides a more insightful explanation of the complexities of the empowerment process and diversity of strategies that can be used in empowering women. Self-confidence, self-esteem, and dignity are the core of personal empowerment which enable individuals to 'move out of the gender assigned roles that her context and cultures have given to her'

(Rowlands, 1997:113). In collective empowerment, individuals with a sense of collective agency and self-organisation and management move together as a team to pursue their interests and needs (Rowlands, 1997:115). Thus, women's agency and identity are core components of both personal and collective empowerment. The ultimate objective of empowerment of women is to create and ensure that structures and processes of development are more equal and participatory so that women may take control over their own lives. Empowerment means consciousness raising and also deconstruction of negative social constructions (Rowlands, 1997:14).

Participation and empowerment - especially when they are being related to women - should not be considered as hierarchical, rather they are dialectical. Participation is the devolution of power and empowerment is control over local resources. Thus, despite the need to distinguish participation and empowerment, both participation and empowerment can be transformative in the way that they seek

...to bring about changes in the distribution of material and symbolic resources and opportunities between women and men within development process but also - and crucially - to bring about changes in the beliefs and values which are internalised by them in the process of acquiring a gendered sense of selfhood since these help to shape the contours of the "beings and doings" which constitute the capacity for women's agency (Kabeer and Subrachmanian, 1996:16).

Outcomes and forms of participation are influenced and determined by its local context (Gujit and Shah 1998:10). Considering the patriarchal structure in Third World countries, the recognition and inclusion of men in women's empowerment is crucial. In Third World cases men tend to be peripheral or nonexistent in gender planning and frequently neglect of men in implementing gender-aware planning, brings women and men into tension (Thin, 1995; Monkman, 1998). Criticising the neglect of men in both Moser's and Molyneux's approaches to women's empowerment in development planning, Thin (1995) argues for the significance of the 'win-win solutions to gender inequalities, which is based on "informed social interests" in which planning puts women into the picture without censoring men from the planning'. The inclusion of men is critical in women's empowerment in Third World countries since 'even though a woman may personally be empowered, without the shared responsibility for household

activities, they will only increase women's burden' (Rowlands, 1997). Strategies for empowerment must therefore recognise and reveal patriarchal social structures which obstruct women's improvement in all levels of the society, but also seek ways of gaining men's support for empowering initiatives for women.

Engendering Local Governance

Local governance does not operate in isolation from processes and activities at the international and state level. Considering the complexity of empowerment and the variety of actors and spaces, this section will first discuss the development of WID (Women in Development) and GAD (Gender and Development) approaches and their influences on state and local government strategies for empowerment of women. It will then explore women's strategies at the grassroots level in engendering local governance.

Gender Mainstreaming

The shift from WID to GAD is important in explaining how Third World government and the state respond to gender needs and interests. The state, as well as international development agencies influenced by WID, championed the establishment of separate mechanisms in the government bureaucracy for the advancement of women. Assuming that women have been left behind in development, WID argues for the central role of the state as a key actor to bring women back in (McGee, 2002:100). The strategy proposed in bringing women back in is to integrate women in development through providing access for women to training and resources (Saunders, 2002:5).

In response to the declaration of the United Nations'Women's Decade (1976-1985), many states established women's machineries at the national level. National women's machineries are advisory and co-coordinating bodies which support government in mainstreaming gender equality. The drive to create these women's machineries is said to come more frequently from outside rather than from strong domestic pressure (Kabeer and Subrahmanian, 1996). On the other hand, studies in the Asia/Pacific region reveal that the strengthening of national machineries, commissions and bureaus for

women is crucial in the early stage of the women and development movement (Snyder, 1995; Corner, 1999).

While WID contributes in highlighting correlations between work and status and their impact on women, which had previously been ignored by development agencies and governments, the capability of WID in explaining subordination of women in Third World countries has been put into question. WID's emphasis on integration of women into development through providing access to training and resources has been criticised as reflecting the liberal view which also argues for education and employment as the most appropriate strategies in equalising women's position and condition in society (Pearson and Jackson, 1998:2). Women's problems are considered as technical or legal rather than structural (Brohman, 1996). As with critics of liberal feminism, WID is also perceived as neglecting differences of political and cultural structures within women in Third World countries (Pearson and Jackson, 1998; Rai, 2002). WID has not only ignored the diversity of women based on class, but also failed to capture 'the negative impact of capitalist accumulation regimes on women as well as on men' (Rai, 2002:61).

These criticisms have been put forward by the Gender and Development approach (GAD) which argues for the centrality of gender relations rather than merely focusing on women in strategies for gender equity. The most significant contribution of GAD is that it highlights diversity among men as well as women based on their socially constructed relations (Kothari, 2002:44). GAD assumes that development is gendered since 'gender ideology permeates in all aspects of life including material (socioeconomic) practices such as work, the distribution of wealth, income and other resources, decision making, political power, rights and entitlements among others' (Saunders, 2002:11). Gender ideology plays an important role in constructing and reproducing gender identities which reproduces gender inequality and gendered institutional practices (Saunders, 2002:11). Thus, the roots of women's problems are not centred on women in isolation but derive from the socially constructed relations between men and women which impacts on the subordination of women. The shift of focus from women to gender relations implies 'the extension from women's

reproductive role (health, family planning, education) to generic issues of macro-economic planning, structural adjustment and debt, environmental degradation and conservation and civil and political organisations – which are clearly general rather than sectoral’ (Pearson and Jackson, 1998:5). Thus, ‘engendering development requires radical transformation of the social, economic, political and cultural institutions on which development was founded’ (McGee, 2002:100).

Since the mid-1980s strategies for enhancing women’s participation have focused on mainstreaming gender concerns across sectors, programmes and ministries rather than separation of WID bureaus and projects (Goetz, 1997:4). The establishment of separate units for women in local government bodies tends to create more organisational tensions than does a mainstream strategy (Moser, 1993:114-116). While WID argues for separation between men and women, GAD argues for gender mainstreaming as a strategy to assess gender impacts of policies and programmes. The Economic and Social Council defines gender mainstreaming as:

A strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated (cited in Corner, 1999:5).

Mainstreaming is perceived as more appropriate in addressing gender needs and interests since it ‘involves ways of getting women’s voices heard in formulating agendas for development as well as the means to ensure that a fair share of available resources gets into their hands’ (Snyder, 1995:191). Thus, mainstreaming puts women in the centre of the development process. The enhancement of women’s participation in decision making becomes a critical component in engendering development.

There are two approaches in mainstreaming: the integrationist approach and the agenda setting approach (Jahan, 1995:13). Working within the existing development paradigms, the integrationist approach aims at widening women and gender concerns across a broad spectrum of sectors. ‘Mainstreaming looks beyond the promotion of projects and programs for women to the consideration of gender issues across all sectors, ministries

and departments' (Byrne and Laier, 1996:1). However, just adding women into projects and programmes without making gender a priority is inadequate to transform development. Therefore, an agenda-setting approach, which aims at transforming development agendas by making women's empowerment a priority in all sectors of development and by enhancing women's participation at all levels and in all sectors of decision making, is crucial in mainstreaming (Jahan, 1995:13). The agenda setting approach in mainstreaming implies:

- A proactive role for women in decision making processes and structures.
- A focus on women's agendas which acknowledge the diversity of women.
- Emphasis on substantive rather than instrumental objectives of the women's movement: gender equality and empowerment by removing legal and institutional barriers to women's equal participation, and designing and implementing gender-responsive policies and interventions.
- Giving primacy to women's agency – strengthening women's groups and people's movements.
- Strategic positioning of gender concerns in a period of change both internally (linking with and influencing other emerging mandates) and externally (requiring women's movement to seize the political space being opened by the emergence of new democracies and the growing strength of civil society) (Jahan,1995:127-128).

Experiences of mainstreaming in Asia and the Pacific highlight two aspects of mainstreaming: mainstreaming gender and mainstreaming women (Corner, 1999). Mainstreaming gender emphasises technical components of empowerment such as the use of various gender tools, including gender analysis, gender statistics and gender budgeting or gender audits, to identify the differential impact on women and men of all policies, and programmes so that appropriate measures can be developed to achieve gender equality (Corner, 1999:15). In this region, where women have long been excluded from formal political processes due to the interlinking of institutional and cultural obstacles, mainstreaming gender is more applicable since it is less controversial and less threatening to men who dominate formal politics and governance. However, mainstreaming women, which emphasises the need to increase women's active

participation in mainstream activities - particularly in politics, leadership and governance - is also important as Corner (1999:18) argues:

...like men, women decision makers can be blind to gender differences, and gender mainstreaming could be carried out with little or no participation from women. Gender equality requires both an active role for women in decision making and a gender perspective that takes into account the potentially different impact of policies and programs on women and men and on different groups of women and men.

Institutional and political constraints in implementing GAD intertwinedly impede the achievement of this approach in transforming gender relations. Institutional constraints emerge from confusion among policy makers and bureaucrats in differentiating between welfare and equity objectives and strategic and practical needs which results in unclear policy goals (Byrne and Laier, 1996:13). This confusions and lack of clarity also impede the effectiveness of national machineries for women since there is confusion over possible roles and activities which the national women's machineries could undertake. National women's machineries with their limited power are perceived as the only government mechanism responsible for women's advancement (Taylor, 2000).

Despite the policy shift from WID to GAD, bureaucrats are still influenced by WID which is reflected in their perception that gender mainstreaming is only about development projects which are aimed at improving and benefiting women. As a result, mainstreaming has been conducted by focusing only on changing women's roles and attitudes without being directly applied to men (Taylor, 2000: 104-105)

The gender-neutral concept of development as applied in many Third World countries' development policies has resulted in gender-neutral interventions which often contain a hidden gender bias (Kabeer and Surachmanian, 1996; O'Connel, 1996). 'Planning documents, especially, the five- year plans, routinely made rhetorical pledges to achieve gender equality but they do not use results oriented targets as planning and programming tools' (Jahan 1995:116). Therefore, gender issues still remain unexplored in a wide range of macro and sectoral policies and programmes (Jahan, 1995).

At the policy level, the macroeconomic focus and the assumption of planners that women will be beneficiaries of welfare and trickle-down approaches rather than participants in structural change causes invisibility of women in the Third World in development planning (Massiah cited in Bruyn, 1995). The intertwined factor of 'gender-subtext' (Jayawardene cited in Kabeer and Subrahmanian, 1996) which assumes the primacy of men as the key factor to economic development and perceives women's concerns as domestic, and the removal of women from the state and their remoteness from women state legislation and action, combined with violence by government officials at the local level (Afshar, 1996) provides an insight in explaining the limited participation of women and male domination in governance in Third World countries.

Political constraints in gender mainstreaming emerge as the result of competition over power and resources among men and women. GAD is considered as a radical approach which works against traditional culture and 'puts men at risk' (Byrne and Laier, 1996:13). The perceived threat to the existing male domination of power and resource distribution posed by GAD produces deep-seated resistance from bureaucrats and policy makers who are mostly men (Moser, 1993; Jahan, 1995). Goetz (1997:4) notes:

Policy-makers remain unmoved by empirical demonstrations of the importance of the gender issue, and in spite of significant increases in numbers of women development professionals, they cannot all be assumed to sympathize with the gender equity cause, and in any case, there are still few women in the upper echelons of decision making in development organisations.

Thus, the existence of gender awareness in institutions does not automatically mean that those institutions have been engendered (Moser, 1995:137).

In Asia and the Pacific the efficiency argument for gender mainstreaming - which emphasises that the community, not only women, will benefit by enhancing women's position tends - to be more easily adopted by government than the mainstreaming argument (Corner, 1999). In countries where patriarchy strongly prevails, the 'win/lose scenario' in mainstreaming women should be transformed into 'win-win scenario' in which 'changing gender roles and relations is good not simply for women - it also

benefits men, families and communities, and would create significant inter-generational benefits' (Jahan, 1995:128).

Considering the inadequacy and difficulties facing government in gender mainstreaming, it is important to look at the responses and strategies of women at the local level in engendering local governance.

Local politics and the empowerment of women

One of the problems with the GAD approach is that while elaborating on the sexual division of labour and the household it has contributed to highlighting the male bias of development theory, the GAD approach still reflects the hegemony of Western perspectives on Third World countries (Marchand and Parpart, 1995; Kothari, 2002). It is difficult to appreciate the diversity of women in Third World countries and their means for empowerment since in this approach 'the experiences and struggles of Third World women are often appropriated and fitted into Western conceptual frameworks, and interpreted according to Western benchmarks' (Kothari, 2002:49). GAD has also ignored 'the role of discriminatory gendered patterns in the incentive systems, accountability structures, and bureaucratic procedure which may run counter to the achievement of gender empowerment attempts' (Goetz, 1997:4). Thus, '...using Western lenses, GAD tends to ignore the overlap of class, ethnicity and gender as sources of oppressions and which define women's lives in developing countries' (Marchand and Parpart, 1995:236).

The weakness of the GAD approach is that it emphasises heavily the empowerment of women through the enhancement of women's participation at the 'formal' sphere of decision making. Thus, it tends to neglect the multiplicity of structures and spaces where decision making can be produced. The consideration of forms of women's participation and empowerment, which is based on Western liberal theory on democracy as being participation in formal public forums, neglects the reality of women's participation in Third World countries which frequently takes different forms.

A poststructuralist approach which acknowledges and respects the diversity of women within societies provides deeper insights into the realms of women in Third World countries. This approach highlights the multiple sources of oppressions of race, class, ethnicity and gender which define the lives of women in these countries (Marchand and Parpart, 1995:236). Considering the diversity of women and kinds of power, poststructuralist feminists argue for alternative spaces and forms of politics and empowerment (Mohanty 1991; Udayagiri, 1995; Marchand, 1995; Waylen, 1996; Rai, 1996). Waylen (1996:18), based on Foucault's definition of power as the 'knowledge and the ability to construct knowledge', perceives political action as 'a struggle over dominant meanings, including dominant ideas of woman, and aiming to change those meanings'. Thus, the notion of political space should be broadened to incorporate the 'multiple locations of power contestation' (Tripp, 1998:6). In other words, political action includes 'the politicizations of the private sphere and entry into the public sphere on that basis' (Waylen, 1996:19). Women's agency and everyday life become important in empowerment of women, which as Wieringa (1995:7) contends '...should be seen as processes which are modified as they come in contact with everyday life, confronting politics and generally (but not always) the state, in a constant process of reflection, communication and negotiation'. Concepts of empowerment, therefore, need to be concretised based on daily lives of women in Third World countries. As Carr et al. (1996:213) succinctly argue:

If empowerment is the ability to exercise power, then everyday forms of women's empowerment are the ability of women to exercise power in the social institutions that govern their daily lives: the household and extended family; local community councils and associations; local elite; local markets; and local government.

Thus, much greater emphasis should be given to the significance of alternative forms of political protests such as 'use of the body and symbols and metaphors and how far they [women] subvert dominant discourses of woman hood' (Waylen, 1996:18).

There are diverse ways through which women interact with the state and local government in fulfilling their practical and strategic gender needs and interests³. Using alternative forms of participation, which are frequently based on traditional gender roles, women in Third World countries struggle in influencing local politics and decision making to fulfil their practical and strategic needs (Jayawardena, 1986; Brohman, 1996; Waylen, 1996). By organising around practical gender needs in a particular location, women raise female consciousness, form solidarity and consciously extend their participation to public activities (Brohman, 1996:297; Waylen, 1996:21). For example, through communal kitchens women in Latin American countries expand the concept of 'motherhood' to include responsibility to the community, to women as a group and to self (Rakowski, 2000:125). For these women personal empowerment seldom 'competes with the values of family and motherhood' (Brohman, 1996:125). Moreover, using their traditional gender roles as mothers and caretakers of the community, women tend to politicise domestic work and raise their consciousness as political actors (Rakowski, 2000:129). By using alternative political strategies such as 'gossip, persuasion, consensus building among community or kinship groups, women in developing countries struggle in challenging the patriarchal structures and try to bring alternatives' (Brohman, 1996:294).

This is not to say that there is no danger in glorifying domestic obligations as an effective entry point for women to participate in formal politics. If women's activities are based only on the acceptance of what is perceived as being women's traditional roles, then women's participation as empowerment can be questioned because it

³Molyneux differentiates between strategic gender needs which are perceived as more political and conducive to achieving gender equality, and practical gender needs which are perceived as immediate needs for daily survival (Moser 1993:39-40).

depends on men and society. For example, in India women are frequently mobilised and organised for the benefit of the community. Their consciousness in influencing the development process at the local level has been raised, yet women still have limited access to leadership and decision making (Desai, 1996:228-229).

In Third World countries alternative strategies work more effectively in empowering women than do confrontational ones (Wieringa, 1995; Rowlands, 1997; Scheyvens, 1998; Desai, 2000). In communities where patriarchy prevails, straightforward feminist arguments will easily lead to rejection from men while at the same time increase women's anxiety about bridging socially ascribed gender roles (Marchand, 1995:64).

Women in Third World countries strategically use traditional gender roles as an entry point to the public sphere because it is considered as being 'culturally acceptable, thus avoiding conflict with men' (Baden, 2000:30). Scheyven (1998) based on her study on strategies for women's empowerment in the Solomon Islands argues that 'subtle strategies' can be more effective than confrontational strategies not only because they avoid conflict with men, but also at the same time provide opportunities for women to raise consciousness and solidarity in dealing with local power structures and gendered relations at household and community levels with minimum interference from threatening powers surrounding them. Women's engagement in organisation enhanced their self-esteem which enabled them to make their contribution appreciated and supported by other members of the community. With this recognition of women's skills and contributions, women in the Solomon Islands took greater roles and positions in public domains which were previously dominated by men. She further argues that the personal and collective empowerment women experience through subtle strategies enable them to extend their access to political power.

Alternative strategies for women's empowerment also provide the opportunity for the creation of a common platform between men and women. By justifying their actions as an extension of women's duties and roles as mothers, Third World women may gain support from men since men perceive that women's actions are in line with their

interests and needs (Marchand, 1995:63). 'In the gendered political culture, consideration of non-political issues which are based on familial issues such as housing, hunger, poverty, security, provide a common platform for men and women (cross class, race and gender alliances) to cooperate (Marchand, 1995:63).

Women's organisations at the local level are crucial in enhancing the effectiveness of alternative strategies in engendering local governance. Women tend to be involved more in local organisations than at the state level to fulfil their needs and interests. In gaining their basic rights in terms of daily needs for survival - for example for water, food and education - women have to 'fight political battles' with all actors in the patriarchal structure, not only their husbands, but also local elites and local government institutions, and other stakeholders at the local level (Carr et al., 1996:213-216). Thus, women's empowerment needs to be based on grassroots initiatives that are designed to meet the specific needs and interests of local women themselves (Brohman, 1996:295).

Provision of alternative spaces, personal empowerment and group solidarity are the most significant contributions of grassroots organisations to women's empowerment. Haque's (2002:56) study on women in Bangladesh reveals that through their engagement in women's organisations, women experience 'bodily empowerment' in the way they adopt new lifestyles, reinvent their relationships with others and react to their surroundings in a critical way. Women's engagement in grassroots organisations is crucial in transforming the gendered local power relations considering individual women's influences on their communities and their personal strategic actions and choices are on a small scale and rather subtle level (Haque, 2002:57). Engagement in grassroots organisations, as the case in Karnataka, provides room for poor rural women to meet together and collectively reflect on their lives, and analyse their problems and actions (Narayanan, 2002). These processes built solidarity among women which was then used by them to challenge discrimination based on gender, caste and class.

A case study of women's empowerment in urban Bombay demonstrates how engagement in grassroots organisations and NGOs contributes to women's

consciousness and sense of political agency which women feel is more rewarding than engagement in formal politics which is often more alienating than empowering (Desai, 2002). Knowledge and skills regarding their practical needs such as health, childcare, and housing which they received by participating in organisations enhanced their self-esteem and self-confidence. Along with their personal empowerment, women challenged unequal gender relationships at the household and community level. Interestingly, this case study reveals that by using subtle strategies, women's organisations in urban Bombay build social capital which is 'the networks of norms and trust which govern societal interactions', and 'transform the previously apolitical women's activities into political activities' (Desai, 2000:219-220). Based on this study Desai (2002:219) succinctly argues that 'subtle strategies can be a form of informal politics, which represent women's citizenship in action, and are important for the empowerment of communities and individuals'.

This is also the case in Uganda where, through collective struggle, women have challenged local patronage networks, pushed for greater government and NGO accountability, sought to bridge ethnic and religious divisions in the community and make participatory structures in the community more inclusive to women and the poor (Tripp, 1998:7). Thus, grassroots organisations have the potential to redefine the connection between the public and private aspects of social lives and also to expand public space to include not only the sphere of state-sponsored political activity, but also a space autonomous from the state. These roles allow for greater pluralism and diversity in empowering women (Bystydzienski and Sekhon, 1999:10).

Conclusion

Concepts of participation, power and empowerment are at the heart of understanding gender inequality in local governance. While acknowledging equity as the rationale behind participation in local governance, general conceptions of participation as described above tend to neglect unequal gender relations at local government and community levels. Popular participation does not automatically include women's

participation since it operates in a gendered dynamic environment. The above discussion also suggests that the increase of women's participation in terms of their contribution to community development does not automatically lead to women's empowerment. Concepts of participation and empowerment which do not take into account constraints women experience at the household and community level will further marginalise women in local governance by giving them additional burdens. In order for women to empower themselves through participation, a focus on gendered power relations and the transformation of unequal power relations in structures and processes of development will be of ultimate significance.

This chapter has highlighted the crucial roles grassroots women's organisations at the local level can play in improving the quality of everyday life and challenging and reconstructing gender inequality at the local level through creative strategies of combining practical and strategic gender interests, in order to achieve personal and collective empowerment of women at the grassroots level. These alternative strategies suggest the importance of understanding women's agency and the diversity of forms and spaces of participation available to and opened up by women. They are difficult to capture using Western Liberal concepts of participation and empowerment since alternative strategies imply 'power to' and 'power with' rather than 'power over' which is emphasised in the Western Liberal concept of empowerment. However, as the above discussions have demonstrated, women in Third World countries prefer 'power to and with' in participating in local governance since this model of power avoids the perception that the increasing power of women is based on the reduction of men's power which will create challenges and resistance from men. Considering the strong hold of patriarchy in most Third World countries, these kinds of power are suitable to be used in empowering women since they are less threatening for both women and men but nonetheless can be effective in bringing social, cultural and political changes. Thus, more attention **needs** to be given to alternative forms of participation and empowerment in engendering local governance. This will become the focus of case studies in the following chapters.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND FIELDWORK

EXPERIENCES

Introduction

This chapter focuses on how I have collected data in line with the main aim of the thesis which is to explore the interaction between women, community organisations and local government in considering how local governments in Indonesia can be more sensitive to gender interests. My methodology is grounded on a feminist participatory approach which enabled me to explore processes of gender inequality in local governance while at the same time raising women's consciousness and sensitising women and men involved in local governance.

This chapter is divided into two main themes: my research philosophy and the implementation of methods and techniques I used in the field. The aim of this chapter is to highlight the rationale for the chosen techniques and how they were adjusted to suit the field situation in order to serve the philosophy of my research which focuses on empowerment and the expression of women's voices. In this participatory research, flexibility, reflexivity and sensitivity to the existence of power relations were crucial in maximizing the benefits of research to participants and to capture the diversity and similarity of ideas among stakeholders in local governance.

The Significance of Qualitative, Participatory and Feminist Research

Qualitative research is most suitable for exploring the complexity of power struggles in engendering local governance in Indonesia since it allows the researcher to gain insights into participants' views and interactions. Denzin and Lincoln (1994:2) describe qualitative research as a study which is conducted in its natural setting and which attempts to make sense of and interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. The ability of qualitative research to capture how social interaction is routinely enacted is frequently pointed out to be one of its strengths of qualitative

research (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Sobo et al., 1998; Silverman, 1999). Hence, qualitative research is suitable in documenting the ways in which meanings are constructed and negotiated within particular social contexts (Holdaway, 2000:166). It will then also be beneficial in understanding critical issues in engendering local governance and in providing explanations for research questions including the nature of women's participation in local governance.

The ethical and political context within which research is conducted is central to qualitative research. Research should be honest in terms of allowing the voices of participants to be heard. Politically, research reports should contain recommendations for action based on participants' views (Hall and Hall, 1996:179). I viewed PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal) as suiting the ethical and political context of my study and providing an empowering approach to my study since it allows participants to express feelings, determine topics of discussions and explain inconsistent/conflicting opinions and deep-seated beliefs, and propose solutions to their problems while at the same time addressing unequal power relations among stakeholders.

PRA differs from traditional research which relies on techniques that are structured. In participatory research for empowerment, the tool is the observer (researcher) and not a questionnaire or an instrument; and the setting is natural, not controlled (Stein, 1997:239). In PRA research becomes 'an open-ended process in which people are given an opportunity to participate in designing questionnaire, developing criteria and indicators, discussing the issues which need to be explored and collecting and analysing data through the use of a range of verbal and visual methods including questionnaires' (Holland and Blackburn, 1998:176). PRA reverses the conventional research methods through 'reversals of frames (from etic to emic); reversals of modes (from individual to group, from verbal to visual, from measuring to comparing); reversals of relations (from reserve to rapport, from frustration to fun); reversals of power (from extracting to empowering)' (Chambers, 1994:1262-1266).

PRA produces high validity and reliability through information sharing and cross checking within participants and at the same time respecting local knowledge and experiences. 'Sitting, asking and listening are as much an attitude as a method. Sitting implies lack of hurry, patience, and humility; asking implies that the outsider is a student; and listening implies respect and learning. Many of the best insights come in this way. Relaxed discussions reveal the questions outsiders do not know to ask, and open up the unexpected' (Chambers, 1984:202). Thus, participatory research avoids exploitation because it does not only generate data for the researcher but at the same time serves as instrument to empower the participants through explaining, and understanding each other's ideas, hopes and perceptions.

Reflexivity is 'a position of a certain kind of praxis where there is a continuous checking on the accomplishment of understanding' (Wasserfall, 1997:151). Reflexivity is very important in participatory research since it allows the researcher to reflect on relationships between themselves while at the same time acknowledging the critical role researchers play in 'creating, interpreting and theorizing research data' (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998:121). Through reflexivity I could recognise biases I brought to the field and determine whose voices would be represented in my writing. Thus, reflexivity is very important as an instrument to control the production of knowledge enabling me to represent participants' views most accurately.

Empowerment is considered to be the ultimate goal of PRA which respects the capability of local people in representing, analysing, planning and controlling their own development (Chambers, 1994; Holland and Blackburn, 1998). In explaining the relevance of PRA for women's empowerment, Cousins (1998:61) argues 'Being gender-sensitive, working on gender relations, and empowering women through PRA means bringing the different perspectives together, facilitating analysis, and discussing and negotiating around these differences. It means following up and supporting further action arising from the exercise. It means accepting that sharp conflict may emerge, and being ready to work with it'.

However, participatory research is not always gender-sensitive. It has been criticised as being male oriented in its approach and in its ignorance to gender as a focus of analysis (Feldstein and Jiggins, 1994; Crawley, 1998). Experiences in using PRA reveal that the PRA itself is not automatically gender sensitive or empowering to women (Mosse 1993; Kabeer and Subrachmanian 1996; Cornwall 2003). Some of the following problems occur in using PRA: practical constraints women experience in participating in PRA (time, locations); social constraints (the exclusion of women from public activities, space differences/public-private and differences within women); social exclusions derived from PRA techniques such as the formality in making maps, tables, and charts, and differences between women and men in articulating their concerns (Mosse, 1993:14-17). Thus, PRA needs to be sensitive to diverse forms of inequality and power relations in different research contexts. It should include participation and control of women in transforming gender relations into equity in local governance.

Inequality and power relations in research have long been the concern of feminists (Reinharz, 1992; Hall and Hall, 1996). Feminists have argued for the need for equitable relationships between researchers and participants and have emphasized for potential the empowerment of participants through the research process. For feminists 'it is difficult to separate science and politics as suggested by Weberian since in feminist research science is integrated into social and political action, and the research process should be empowering to women' (Mies cited in Hall and Hall, 1993:179). The goal and ideals of PRA, participation and empowerment, are argued as showing similarity with those of feminist research that is to make people's voices heard and to influence policy making by emphasising people's knowledge (Reinharz, 1992; Atwood and May, 1998; Holland and Blackburn, 1998). PRA concurs with feminists' research goals in the ways it documents the lives and activities of women seek to understand the experience of women from the women's own point of view, and conceptualises women's behavior as an expression of social contexts. Therefore, in ensuring gender sensitivity in conducting participatory research, this research uses a feminist theoretical framework which recognises conflicts of power over local governance structures and processes based on gender divisions.

Research Design

I gathered secondary data for this research by reviewing published and unpublished documents relevant to local governance in Indonesia. Then the primary data was collected using a combination of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), in depth interviews, case studies and participant observation. To the best of my knowledge, the issue of engendering local governance in Indonesia with particular emphasis on the interaction between local government, women and women's organisations was yet to be explored. Therefore, in order to allow participants' suggestions on important issues in local governance to influence the design of the study, I decided to conduct FGDs with diverse stakeholders at the local level. These stakeholders included: community organisations such as the *LKMD* (*Lembaga Ketahanan Masyarakat Desa* or Institution for the Defence of Village Society), Family Welfare Development Program (PKK), religious women's groupings, *arisan* (informal women's groups in which members collect and lend money among themselves), women's interest NGOs, Management Team for the Enhancement of Women's Role (TPP2W), and local government officials. These FGDs were aimed at exploring the important themes in women's relationship with local government while also sensitizing both women and men to gender issues in local governance. Issues emerging from FGDs would be used in formulating topics for in-depth interviews

During primary data collection my plan was to take notes on participants' perceptions and attitudes. With permission from participants all interviews and FGDs would be audio recorded. Finally I would present a seminar while still in the field on my initial findings to gain feedback from research participants, scholars and groups interested in engendering local governance.

Regarding the large number of different actors involved in local governance and the complexity of their interaction, I decided to use case studies in order to gain a more detailed picture of the interaction between women, local government and community organisations involved in local governance. Basically, case study design is an approach in data collection and analysis in which the focus of inquiry and sampling strategy are

simultaneously refined during the ongoing research process allowing for the emergence of other information (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Maykut and Moorehouse, 1994). The main strength of case study design is that it allows for research design to evolve over time. Therefore, case studies were central to the objectives of this study since they would allow for a flexible and detailed investigation into the complex dynamics of power structure associated with women's struggle to have access and control over the development process at the local level.

Medan, which is the capital city of North Sumatra province, was chosen as the location for case study for this research (see Figure 2 page 88; Figure 3 page 89). The selection of this case study area was based primarily on the consideration that in-depth exploration and observation of perceptions, strategies and processes of interaction between various actors involved in local governance in Medan would provide rich data which would illuminate the research problem. The accessibility of the location and my familiarity with the social and cultural systems of the prospective research participants were also important determinants.

Notwithstanding geographical and demographic differences within regions in Indonesia, I believe the similarity of local government in Indonesia and the multi-ethnicity of the population of Medan would allow Medan to be somewhat representative of other Indonesian cities. It was hoped that research on Medan would present ideas about women and local government interaction and its complexities which were valid in other regions as well.

Considering that Medan consists of both rural and urban regions, and that factors of social and cultural values, and differences of gender needs and interests between these regions may have some influences on the realm of engendering local governance, I purposefully chose Medan city to represent the urban regions. Lubuk Pakam, Perbaungan, Dairi and Sidikalang were selected to represent the rural regions in North Sumatra. I selected these locations based on information I gained from discussions with NGOs and local government officials. My consideration in choosing these rural sites

will be explained in detail in later discussion on implementing research design in practice section in this chapter.

Techniques

Various techniques which were to be used in conducting the study were as follows:

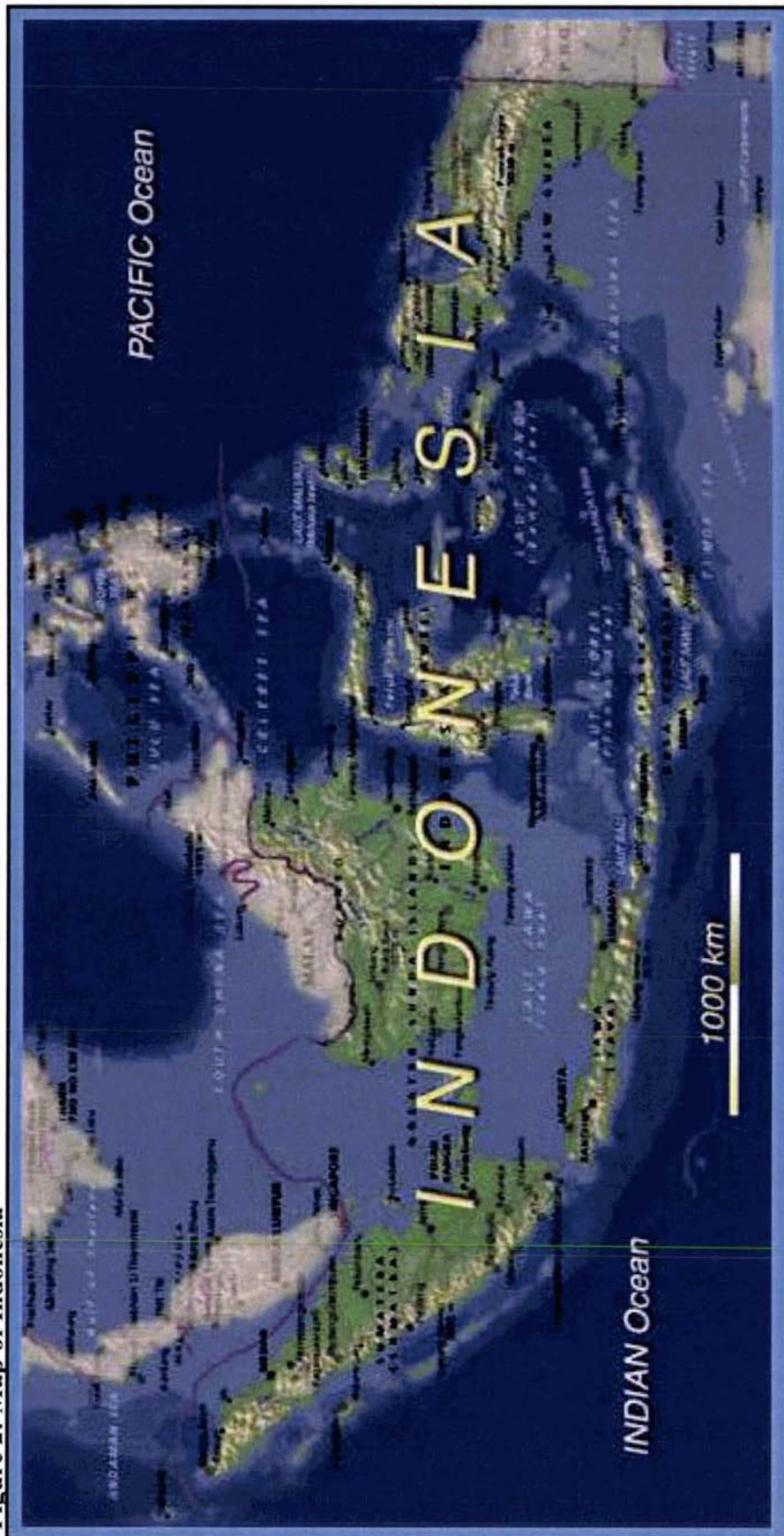
Secondary data review

Data and information gathered from national and local official documents (policies, reports and related statistical figures, newspapers, books, journals and research reports) would be used especially in gathering information on the history, structure and the development of local government, geographical and population characteristics of the research location, and the development of policies regarding women's issues in local governance and development planning.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

The significance of the FGD as a research tool is that it can allow the researcher to explore, record and analyse interaction between participants (Oates, 2000:186-187), and to test the focus of the research, data collection and the analysis for its representativeness and generalisability (Bernard, 2000:175). Differing from the one to one interview, power relations between participants and researchers are more equalised in FGDs and participants may have more control over the discussion. Moreover, in FGDs interactions occur not only but also among participants, between participants and researcher. In FGDs the dynamics within the group is useful as the validity of data because in FGD participants through their statements, questioning of the statements, clarifying and responding, also function in checking and rechecking each other's information.

Figure 2: Map of Indonesia



I planned to conduct FGDs separately with women and men from local government offices and community organisations in order to gather significant information which would be used for identifying perceived problems in engendering local governance, definitions and concepts of gender, components of good local governance, and strategies of women and NGOs in participating in local governance. Separating men and women in FGDs was a strategy to avoid male domination in discussions and the occurrence of conflict between men and women. Differentiating women and men in FGDs might also empower women because it could give them confidence to argue their case (Chambers, 1997).

In addition to gender, I also decided to group participants in FGDs according to differences of experiences and education within women and men. Therefore, I decided to conduct twelve separate FGDs (6 FGDs at the urban level and 6 FGDs at the rural level). At the rural level the FGDs were to comprise a group of women involved in NGOs and PKK (Family Welfare Development Program), a group for women from TPP2W (including female local government officials and the University of North Sumatra Women Studies Centre), a third group of women involved in religious groupings (*perwiridan*) and *arisan* (self rotating credit scheme), a fourth group of men who are members of LKMD (village community's resilience organisation), a fifth group of male local government officials, and lastly, a group of men involved in women's interest NGOs. A similar categorisation of FGDs was also to be applied at the urban level. Later in the research, after important issues had been identified, an FGD consisting of some of the women and men from the previous FGDs would be conducted in order to share their experiences and ideas about ensuring gender sensitivity in local governance.

The strength of FGDs lies in the interaction that occurs in the discussions (Morgan, 1997). However, as Wilkinson (1998) argues 'reports on FGD are frequently presented as they are for one to one interviews and interactions between participants is rarely analysed' (Wilkinson, 1998). Therefore, my aim was to try to record and to present data from the FGDs in the form of interactive dialogue. Emerson et al. (1995) has rightfully

argued for the significance of allowing questions and answers to emerge from the field since this will allow for the emergence of 'local meaning, orientation and discourse' (Emmerson et al., 1995:119-126). Although I prepared a topic guide with questions prior to conducting field research, I knew that more questions relevant to the objectives of the research would emerge in the field. Therefore I developed a flexible topic guide with loosely phrased questions to organise discussions while still allowing topics that interested the participants to emerge. By using this strategy I hoped that the FGDs would provide opportunities for the participants to express not only 'what' but 'why' issues and to question each other so participants would provide explanations for what they said. Where possible, I planned to video-tape the FGDs in order to record the non verbal behaviour/gestures. The FGDs would also be used in collecting suggestions from participants about the design of the study.

FGDs are considered of high ethical value for feminist research since they bring the researcher 'closer to the essential meanings of women's lives' (Wilkinson, 1998:120). It was hoped that through sharing of feelings, experiences and hopes, women would develop their self-awareness and have enhanced confidence to participating and to determine their involvement in local governance.

Diagrams

During FGDs, I wanted to encourage participants to make diagrams and models, PRA-style comparing gender differences in making use of and benefiting from local government institutions and public services these institutions provided, and differences in access to planning and decision making processes at the local level. By explaining the reasons for these differences to the researcher I hoped that both women and men would, to a certain degree, increase their insights and understanding about each other's needs and interests.

Institutional or Venn Diagramming

Another technique associated with PRA, Venn diagrams, was to be used in FGDs in identifying local government institutions and community organisations which participants considered as representing women's interests sharing which ones best served women's strategic and practical needs. It was hoped the diagrams would reveal patterns of relationships between local government, women's interest NGOs and community organisations in local governance.

Case Studies

My aim was that case studies would focus on interaction occurring in TPP2W at the city and village level in planning, coordinating and implementing their programmes to enhance women's role in the local development process. The TPP2W consists of the Women's Studies Center, local government agencies and community organisations such as PKK and LKMD. The TPP2W aims to integrate women's aspirations and needs into various development programmes at the local level, coordinating central government policies on women, and increasing community participation in enhancing women's role in development. With certain issues which were considered as urgent in increasing women's role in development, TPP2W would form a task force. In this task force the interaction between state and non state stakeholders became more obvious since it involved NGOs, the private sectors, and community organisations along with the other members of TPP2W in formulating and implementing programmes in increasing women roles in development.

In-depth interviews

I planned to conduct in-depth interviews with leaders of women's interest NGOs, community organisations (PKK, LKMD, women's religious groupings and 'arisan'), and TPP2W. In-depth interviews were to be conducted to explore participants' ideas

and attitudes concerning the potential, problems and prospects for engendering local governance in Indonesia. I devised a checklist for interviews containing major topics, which would remind me of issues to explore, rather than controlling the direction of my interviews. This has to allow for the emergence of new and relevant issues which could be important for data analysis. Careful probing and prompting was to be conducted simultaneously to clarify participants' responses without biasing them. It was hoped that these kinds of interactive interviews would enable me to explore and understand the interviewees' perceptions and attitudes to engendering local governance especially in gender issues in their organisational culture, and on problems of partnerships between local government, women's interest NGOs and community organisations.

Participant Observation

I planned to participate in the activities of TPP2W through the University of North Sumatra's Women Studies Centre's (PSW) involvement in the development planning process. PSW is actively involved in sensitizing local government officials by conducting training on gender sensitive planning for these officials. The aim was to explore, observe and understand the dynamics and problems/strategies of grassroots women in participating in local governance.

Seminar

I decided it would be a good idea to hold a seminar at the final stage of the fieldwork in order to analyse and evaluate research information. Those to be invited to this seminar included local university staff and researchers interested in gender and governance as well as women and men involved in development planning.

Sampling Procedure

Data collection was aimed at providing insights into the diverse perceptions, knowledge, and attitudes of local government staff involved in development planning and in implementing development programmes for women, as well as the ideas of

community organisations and women's interest NGOs. In seeking and understanding this diversity, I planned to use purposive sampling. Mason (1996:96) explains purposive sampling as:

a set of procedures where the researcher manipulates their analysis, theory and sampling activities interactively during the research process. It is intended to facilitate a process whereby researchers generate and test theory from the analysis of their data, rather than using data to test out or falsify a pre-existing theory.

In other words, the selection of the sample in purposive sampling is based on research questions and guided by theoretical principles aiming at maximum variation which will capture the diversity of the population and strengthen the explanatory power of the study (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Maykut and Moorehouse 1994; Bryman and Burgess 1997). In this study the sample would be continuously refined until it was seen to provide adequate understanding of the process and the problems associated with engendering local governance in Indonesia and it made meaningful comparisons between diverse actors involved in local governance. However, I would include other participants if I found they significantly contributed to the understanding of the study.

Implementing Research Design in Practice

The following sections focus on how data collection went in practice. They discuss the weakness and strengths of techniques chosen when they were implemented in the field. The central argument in the following sections is that in participatory research, the research process itself is very important and that techniques and methods used should not be rigid but flexible so as to suit the character of research participants and the intended research philosophy. Since in participatory research the researcher is immersed in close relationships with participants, techniques used should appreciate local knowledge and be sensitive to the existence of power relations, thus allowing greater participation of research participants in the production of knowledge.

Trialing My Research in Palmerston North

Prior to entering the field I conducted a Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with Indonesian women who are studying in Palmerston North. Some of them are pursuing their Masters degrees and some are PhD students. I also interviewed the Palmerston North Mayor and one of the policy analysts in Palmerston North City Council. Although information from the FGD and interviews cannot be used to represent the views of Indonesian women residing in my case study area, I found it very important in trying out my interview guide while exploring some crucial issues that I may have neglected. For example, during the trial FGDs with Indonesian women, household relations, which I never thought of as important to my research on local governance, emerged as the most discussed topic.

In the field, I found discussions on household relations provided an entry point and insights into more complex discussions on local governance since most participants could be actively involved in these discussions which were based on their interests and daily experiences. Interestingly, despite differences of levels of education between Indonesian women in Palmerston North and women at the grassroots in Indonesia, it is obvious that relationships at the household level and, especially, the husband's support, significantly influence women's participation in local governance. Notwithstanding diversity of these participants, discussing local governance is not an easy task. The level of local government that women were comfortable discussing this with was the neighbourhood or ward level.

Selecting Participants

While in the field I changed my sampling from purposive sampling to snowballing since purposive sampling could not locate many relevant participants, especially grassroots women who were not involved in formal organisations, but who are also stakeholders in local governance in North Sumatra. Snowballing is well suited to finding less detectable participants because it:

a. Provides access to part of a population who may not be included in a researcher's definition of their sample.

b. Breaks down power relations between the researcher and the researched by allowing trust to develop because the participants or the researched know somebody who knows the researcher (Standing, 1998:188-189).

Snowballing enabled me to locate women who were less visible in local governance, such as full time housewives who do not join formal women's organisations, as well as to capture the diversity of stakeholders involved in local governance in Indonesia. For example, from an interview with local government officials, it was suggested that I should interview one woman who was a *Lurah* (head of an urban locality) in Medan. The *Lurah* also introduced me to a *Kepala Lingkungan* (head of a ward) who then introduced me to women in his location. In a visit to his house, I also had the opportunity to interview one of the only two women who was a *kepala lingkungan* in Medan.

Seminars and conferences on women also provided me with strategic entry points to locate participants. Through discussions with my colleagues (from PSW/Women's Studies Centre and others involved in NGOs) I found locations where there are active women's community-based groups that are associated with NGOs. For example, I met the leader of HAPSARI, a women's NGO active in empowering women, through my colleague. After discussions with this leader, she introduced me to the members of SPI (Serikat Perempuan Independen/ Independent Women's Unitary) Bingkat and PIKP (Pusat Informasi dan Kajian Perempuan/ Centre for Information and Study of Women) that are funded by and associated with HAPSARI. Since SPI consists of women's CBOs (community based organisations) from diverse regions such as Bingkat, Labuhan Batu and Simalungun, by participating in their activities such as conferences and discussions, I extended my relationships with other members of SPI from a number of villages. They also introduced me to NGOs that networked with them such as Joipara, Perbuni, Seruni, and Nelayan. These extended relationships enabled me to gain men's insights into these NGOs and to gain information of experiences and voices from a greater range of participants that enhanced the diversity of my research. I also had the opportunity to have discussions with women's NGOs from outside North Sumatra such as South

Sumatra's and Acehnese women's NGOs whose members I met in conferences or at other activities related to women's empowerment conducted by HAPSARI and other women's NGOs.

Because of the difficulty in locating the locus of interaction between women and local government, I used every opportunity to attend seminars or congresses related to women. On one occasion I even attended BKOW (Badan Koordinasi Organisasi Wanita/ Women's Organisation Coordinating Body) congress to which I was not invited, although I asked the organizer for permission to attend the congress, because I thought it would give me the opportunity to meet many women from different organisations. In this congress I met with the secretary of WKRI (Indonesian Catholic Women) who then invited me to observe their congress, which was attended by members of WKRI from other regions in North Sumatra. After the congress, I had time to discuss issues informally with some women members of WKRI. Thus, snowballing enabled me to continuously refine the selection of my participants, which enhanced the diversity of my participants and helped me to select case studies most relevant to my research topic.

Research Ethics

Prior to information gathering, I informed research participants about the aims of the research so that participants consciously agreed to participate in the research process and could withdraw whenever they may want to.

During the fieldwork, I put much attention to avoiding gender-based conflict and domination in discussions. Putting women and men together in a discussion without exploring the areas of potential conflict and cultural consideration, would lead to either domination by men, or conflict or withdrawal of women from the research process. Therefore, at the initial stage of the research, I conducted Focus Groups Discussions separately between men and women.

I also informed participants about the confidentiality of their identities and that the disclosure of any information related to their personal identity would only be made possible with their agreement. In the thesis I use codes and pseudonyms, for names and places, in protecting the confidentiality of participants. In cases where participants did not have any objection to have their names, groups and places, mentioned such as SPI, HAPSARI and other NGOs, I use actual groups' name and places. The participants informed me that they did not mind that I revealed their identities because information they provided are true and that it will introduce their groups and lessons that can be learned in empowering women.

Techniques Used in the Field

Choice of techniques used in the field was based on the philosophy of my research. I used an interactive approach as Freire (quoted in Stein, 1997:237) defines as 'Listening, dialogue, discussion, self-reflection, critical thought, action and back to listening in empowering research'. I found FGDs, in-depth interviews and participant observation were complementary to each other, and appropriate for doing empowering research. Some of the other techniques identified in the first part of this chapter did not prove useful in practice.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Participants can be empowered by providing a forum in which they may freely express their experiences and expectations and learn from each other. For women with limited time because of their traditional domestic responsibilities, FGDs provide space and the opportunity to express their unexpressed feelings. FGDs were not only useful to gain data relevant to the research topic but also to create forums for dialogue which previously never existed between participants. For example, the participants used these discussions to express the problems they faced in their personal lives, challenges and threats from society to their engagement in organisations, and to question government

development programs that were of interest to them such as the Social Safety Net (JPS/ Jaring Pengaman Sosial) program and assistance for their children's education.

As one technique of data collecting, the strength of FGDs lies in group dynamics that emerge among participants in their interaction in their encouragement of one another and in finding solutions to problems they face, and in criticising and challenging one another's ideas or opinions. For example, a mother from Simalungun proudly spoke about her reaction to people who questioned whether the words 'sisterhood among women' on the SPI blouse she wore meant that there was no sorority between men and women. She answered that there was no need to have solidarity with men since men were cruel. Another woman suggested that the woman should not answer that way, because then their organisation (SPI) would be considered as 'husband slayers'⁴. Their discussion was continued by a woman who told of her experience of being caught and rudely treated by the military because of her stealing palm kernel (*ninja sawit*), she reasoned that she did this because of the monetary crisis at a time when her husband did not have any work, but other women responded that whatever the reason that is still stealing. This FGD later on evolved into a discussion about corruption by local government officials and other local government actions that have suppressed women and influenced women's political orientation. Group dynamics in FGDs also revealed diversity in terms of women experiences and power.

However FGDs, as with other techniques of data collection, also exhibit some weaknesses. Power relations, even with participants from the same women's group, are difficult to avoid. Leaders and active members of the groups tended to dominate the discussions. Directing questions to silent participants was not effective since with the existing power relations, the participants who were silent when questioned about their

⁴ This term is used to derogate women who actively involved in organisation outside PKK, *perwiridan* and SPI, such as the case of SPI, since their activities are perceived by some members of their community as intended to destroy their husbands.

opinion usually said that they their opinion was similar to those who had spoken (their leaders). Therefore, listening to women's quiet conversations and chatting with them after FGDs was an appropriate means of capturing perceptions of these silent participants.

It was also difficult to directly start FGDs with the topic of local government since local government seems to be so far removed from the experiences of most women. By letting conversations familiar to women such as household relations, health and children's education flow, the FGD developed so that interesting and sometimes unexpected issues crucial to local governance were raised such as corruption, cheating in elections, and their political orientation, issues which were not in my original topic guide.

There were also other problems of time and location in terms of gathering women together to have discussions. To invite women to attend discussions without considering their limited time because of their traditional gender responsibilities and restricted mobility outside of the house, would have increased their burdens or limited participation. Therefore, I negotiated a time and place for discussions with participants and we came to an agreement that we would use the time they usually gathered as organisations to do the discussions. For example, it was difficult to arrange FGDs in Toba Samosir because of the dispersed location of their members. We decided that we would use the time before a meeting, to which these women were also invited, in the *Camat's* (head of sub-district) office for an FGD. However, when the time came there was no place available for the discussion at the *Camat's* office, so we just sat down on a public bench on the shore of Lake Toba. Although this was a public space, the participants discussed their ideas quite openly and they even decided that they would not attend the meeting at the *Camat's* office but continue our discussion because they considered this discussion as being more important and interesting to them.

Venn Diagram

I found Venn diagrams were very difficult to do in the field research. Only in the FGD of *perwiridan* in *kelurahan* Melayu was it done, and even then with much difficulty. At first no woman would willingly hold a pen. It was only after they discussed, then, came to an agreement that a woman with higher education would draw and others would comment on the topic discussed, that they were willing to proceed.

In some cases, the Venn diagram exercise did not work at all. Rather, once I introduced my intention to do Venn diagrams, this immediately raised tensions and increased power relations between myself and the participants. This was the case even with the women who were frequently involved in organisations. The most significant factor deterring them from this exercise was women's uneasiness with writing. With low levels of education, holding a pen was not appropriate for participants since most women could not write nor read. A woman leader suggested to me that many women would be threatened by an outsider who came with pen and paper. She told me:

If they saw you bring a pen and paper to our meeting they would say "I can't write and read. It's better for me to go home". Then they would go home quietly through the back door (CBO4, November 2001).

But I noticed that their fear of holding a pen was not only because of their low education but also because of the possibility of a threatening reaction from government because by having a written document they would be easily recognized. This fear of government was obvious from questions from participants such as 'This will not have some negative impact on us, will it?' At this point, I informed them again about the confidentiality of information I gained from them and that I would only use their information for academic purposes.

The weakness of the Venn Diagram technique in my field work was that it increased the power gradient between myself and my participants. This occurred right from when I had to describe what Venn diagrams were. Although I tried to explain in the simplest words I could, that they could write or draw anything they wanted to describe the institutions familiar to them, they were still confused about the terms 'institution',

'organisation' and 'gatherings'. On one occasion the only organisation they drew was their organisation, because for them, the word 'institution/organisation' equates the name of their organisation. With participants' inability to read and write, they relied on their memories. Therefore, they preferred discussion of organisational networks to the drawing of diagrams. The participants' reactions differed greatly when I just chatted with them, and thus it was from informal conversations that I gained extensive information about what institutions were related to them and best at meeting their needs.

Journal

My journal, in which I described my feelings and which provided a basis for reflection, was very important to my field research. By reviewing notes about group dynamics described in journal, I continuously refined my approach to participants as well as the focus of my research.

In the field, a journal can be an important instrument to avoid exploitative relations with participants. Prior to the FGDs, I explained to my research assistant the objectives of my research and how it was essential to notice how participants interacted with one another (group dynamics), as well as the situations and conditions of the surroundings. After the FGD, we discussed my assistant's notes on group dynamics and compared them to mine. I found this very useful to gain comprehensive insights and reduce the possibility of bias in my interpretation of data gained from the FGDs since during FGDs I was fully concentrated on information gatherings that sometimes I could not fully capture the situations and conditions of the surrounding.

Participant Observation

As explained earlier in this chapter, I felt my active engagement in observing local governance and processes of women's empowerment was an important element of conducting participatory research. Being there with the women in their natural settings and experiencing what they experienced, I was able to gain insights into the realm of problems and strategies facing women in participating in local governance. In my

research proposal I intended to limit myself to participant observation of TPP2W by participating in TPP2W in the planning process. But in the field I found that, as admitted by members of TPP2W, this is just an 'on paper women's empowerment program, instructed by central government' with activities focusing mostly on members reporting their programs to the governor (LGO2; LGO3; LGO5, December 2001). Therefore, I could not find interaction between local government and women by participating in this institution. This exemplifies the weakness of secondary data in which the researcher relies on government documents.

By participating in the grassroots women's activities such as in their gatherings, discussions, conferences and seminars, I found the true focus of my research. When I spent nights with SPI members in their preparation for declaration of the formation of a women's federation, I was surprised to find how interested they were in politics. Before going to bed and immediately after waking up, they continued discussing and analysing problems in the community. Jokes shared while cooking or cleaning also revealed that women do have some power over their choices. As one woman said: 'Husbands can be politicised without them knowing it, but we cannot politicise the *bumbu* (food's spices) since everybody will know about it and complain'. Her point was that while women had to continue with their traditional roles (such as cooking), they could still covertly work on changing their husbands' attitudes and behaviors in pursuing her interests. Solidarity among members was also revealed in the way in which members took turns to clean and cook. Each member contributes something they have, such as rice, dried anchovies, chilli, or vegetables and they share it together.

Participant observation also revealed power relations and the danger of pressure on women within their organisation. In one activity, two of the members expressed their intention to go home because it was late and that they were afraid that their husband would not allow them to participate in the organisation anymore. But immediately other members turned against them and warned them that they should be committed to their organisations and the consequences of what they are doing. Therefore, these women were told that they should stay until the activity finished. Although these women did

stay until the activities finished, they complained to me that it is easy for the women who object to their going home earlier because they already have grown up children or have somebody to take care of their children. But these two women still had young children who could not take care of themselves.

Participant observation contributed to rapport building with participants since they perceived me as part of their group, someone they could trust. On one occasion, the women had to stay overnight to conduct a rehearsal for a play they were going to perform. Being a woman, I could imagine how severe it would be for these women, especially as some of them brought their young children, to stay overnight in a place with no walls and no toilets. While the leaders told me that the women had agreed to stay overnight, the women told me that they never knew beforehand the condition of the place they would be staying in. Whilst not complaining to the leaders or organizers, they said to me “We feel like orphans with no place to sleep”. I bought them some ginger drinks and food which I hoped may warm them a little. I also proposed that they might use an NGO office (which I had an association with) to sleep. Another NGO, then also proposed their place and since this NGO’s location was closer to the location of the event, these women finally stayed in this NGO’s office.

Participating in various activities of participants, including conducting a radio interview on decentralisation and speaking about gender in various discussions with the participants, enabled me to experience challenges women face and the complex dynamics of processes of women’s empowerment.

In-depth interviews

The privacy of in-depth interviews enabled participants to speak freely since no other persons were involved in the interviews. For example, a male NGO activist expressed his disagreement with a female speaker in a seminar about inheritance. When I asked why he did not directly bring this up in the seminar, he said that he did not want to place himself in conflict/confrontation with the speaker. He also expressed his concern over

the tendency in women's empowerment activities to perceive men as the enemy of women. I would not have this insight if I spoke to this man in a FGD.

Interviews with local government officials provided me with the opportunity to inform local government officials about women's position and problems. Almost in all in-depth interviews with local government officials, they would ask about what gender was, what is gender sensitivity and about experiences from other countries regarding women's empowerment. Being a woman, sometimes I found it difficult to control my emotions when local government officials blamed women for their invisibility in local governance. This occurred especially when they discussed *kodrat* (women's natural talents are as mothers and wives), such as suggesting that women naturally have limited or lower capability than men because of their *kodrat*. Taking the stance not to be neutral but advocating for gender equity, at least in the form of informing participants about women's struggle, while created problems/conflicts in some instances also lessened psychological conflict I felt in interviewing some particularly narrow-minded participants.

Raising Consciousness through the Seminar/Workshop

Participatory research has frequently been used in reaching out to grassroots people. In this research I found that participatory research was also effective in reaching out, sensitising and influencing the 'elite' such as policy makers at the local and provincial level so as to establish networks among diverse stakeholders.

After commencing with my PhD studies, I applied for a fellowship with the International Policy Fellowships (IPF), which was sponsored by Soros foundation in affiliation with Open Society Institute and Central European University, Budapest. This fellowship is aimed at encouraging researchers and policy makers from countries in transition to democracy to produce policy papers regarding issues which are central to transition that is taking place in their countries. Being a fellow of IPF enabled me to intensify my associations with policymakers in North Sumatra. Establishing networks

between women and policymakers is critical in attempting to incorporate women's interests in local government's policies and programs.

While during my first period of field research I had established useful contacts with policymakers, in my second visit to the field I intensified my networks with strategic policymakers especially with those who work in the North Sumatra's regional development planning board (BAPPEDA-SU). The head of North Sumatra's regional development planning board, Ir.Budi Sinulingga MSi, willingly became my mentor during my fellowship. I chose to work with the BAPPEDA-SU since it has important roles in formulating development policies, and programs, and development budget (which I assumed as strategic in providing resources to and support of engendering local governance). Another consideration was that through my previous interviews during my first period of field research I found the head of BAPPEDA-SU was willing to learn and share experiences and ideas regarding gender issues of development planning and programs in North Sumatra.

Based on my preliminary research I found that neglect towards gender issues among local government officials was often derived from their lack of information on women's perceptions due to the absence of effective mechanisms for dialogue with women at the grassroots. Therefore, I conducted a *semiloka* (combination of seminar and workshop) at the end of my second stage fieldwork which was attended by representatives of women's religious groupings, CBOs, NGOs, delegations from BAPPEDA, Women's Empowerment Bureau representation from all over North Sumatra and few members of the regional house of representatives (DPRD). Prior to conducting the *semiloka*, I had discussions with key persons from religious groupings, CBOs, NGOs and local government officials regarding the form, structure and topics of the meeting. This *semiloka*, which was entitled *Isu Jender Dalam Implementasi Otonomi Daerah Di Propinsi Sumatra Utara* (Gender Issues in the Implementation of Regional Autonomy in North Sumatra), was organised by FISIP USU (Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, University of North Sumatra) and BAPPEDA-SU. The official invitation disseminated by BAPPEDA-SU has contributed significantly to the high attendance of

regional planning board officials from municipalities/districts in North Sumatra. The *semiloka* was successfully conducted on 29 January 2003 in Medan and was attended by 70 participants with equal representation of female and male participants. This equal representation was encouraging since usually activities which discuss gender are mostly attended by women.

The *semiloka* was structured in participatory ways which provided more opportunity for discussions. After opening speech from the Governor of North Sumatra, which was read by the head of the Women's Empowerment Bureau, and from the Dean of FISIP USU, the head of BAPPEDA-SU gave a presentation on gender issues in formulating development planning in North Sumatra. Then I briefly presented my preliminary research findings and provided some key points for discussion on gender and local governance. This was followed by questions from participants and responses from speakers. In a 'voices from the grassroots' (*suara dari lapangan*) session, two women from the CBOs told stories about their experiences, problems and expectations in dealing with local government. During a coffee break, participants watched and discussed the theatre performed by HAPSARI about the daily life of women as laborers in plantation estates in North Sumatra.

Participants were then divided into four groups: academics, local government officials (LGOs), members of DPRD (Regional House of Representatives), CBOs/NGOs/*perwiridan*. Each group was led by someone who I considered to be a capable facilitator in ensuring that discussion flowed democratically. Academics were led by an academic who had conducted much research on gender and was involved in the PSW (Women's Study Centre). The group which consisted of CBOs, NGOs and *perwiridan* was led by a women's NGO activist. The Head of the Women's Empowerment Bureau of North Sumatra led the LGOs group. Members of DPRD, students and news reporters were gathered in a group which was led by a female lawyer who used to be involved in an NGO. These groups were asked to produce action plan, which identified potentials, obstacles, strategies and indicators for engendering local governance in North Sumatra. It was interesting to notice how the focus of discussions

differed among groups. Academics spent much of their time discussing theoretical aspects of gender; the DPRD group focused on budgets, NGOs and grassroots women on cultural and structural problems; and LGOs on institutions and problems in identifying women's interests. Despite this diversity, all groups pointed to the significant influence of the household, culture and religion on women's participation in local governance. Then, each group presented their analysis and action plans which was followed by questions from other groups and responses from the presenters. Presenters were chosen directly by members of each group. Interestingly, two females (from the academics and DPRD groups) and two males (from LGOs and NGOs/CBOs/*perwiridan* groups) presented their groups' action plans.

While FGDs with grassroots women and in-depth interviews with diverse stakeholders at the initial stage of research had been useful in identifying problems in engendering local governance in North Sumatra, this *semiloka* was critical in influencing and raising consciousness among policymakers of the urgency of incorporating a gender perspective into local government development policies, structures and processes. For example, by sharing her experiences, a female LGO proved to her male colleagues that there was discrimination against women in local governance. She said that although due to her high position in one local government agency she should have the right to occupy a house provided for government officials, when she proposed this her boss told her that giving her a house was not a priority because her husband could provide a house. Also a male LGO through discussions finally found out that many of his organisation's projects and programs had been insensitive to women's interests. His response was: *'Next time we must consider that our public transportation will suit women'*. Other members suggested that gender indicators should be incorporated in local government programs and projects. In another example, a male LGO criticised and rejected his colleagues gender biased perceptions that women were gossipers and emotional. He argued *'Women gossip in their arisan and gatherings, but men also gossip in coffee shops...so both men and women can be good gossipers'*.

Inviting grassroots women to tell their experiences in dealing with government at their localities provides opportunity for women to have dialogue with policy makers. Stories told by women at the grassroots have opened the eyes of policy makers and informed them that there were problems in the implementation of their policies that need to be improved in order for local government to succeed. For women at the grassroots, this seminar was empowering since they had the opportunity and courage to speak in front of influential policy makers (CBO4; NGO1; NGO2, January 2003). For example, a woman from a CBO revealed problems her group faced in participating in local governance in their villages. This woman demanded that local government should allocate a budget for organisations that provide training and political education for women in the villages rather than distributing the budget only to PKK and Dharma Wanita. This idea was supported by a female vice Bupati. The female vice Bupati strongly suggested to the head of the regional planning board that local government should give more attention to women since women are the majority in Indonesia. On the other hand, local government officials explained difficulties they experienced in implementing policies and reaching women. Unfortunately, the seminar was conducted after the regional planning budget had been determined. However, the head of the regional planning board in North Sumatra promised to participants in the *semiloka* that inputs in this *semiloka* would be considered in the next regional development budget.

Discussions were constructive in bridging gaps of information and understanding between policy makers, NGOs, CBOs and grassroots women. During discussions the inclusion of gender budget in regional budget, adoption of gender issues in local government regulations (Perda) and local government recognition to other women's organisations beside PKK and Dharma Wanita, which are sensitive issues and have rarely been discussed in public, came up in proposed action plans. A female member of DPRD told me that during the *semiloka* she had talked with a female vice Bupati who agreed that they would provide more money and activities aimed at empowering women in their region.

I gained insightful criticisms from CBO participants that this *semiloka* could have been more effective should more members of the regional house of representative have attended, as they needed to sit and listen so that they would have the commitment to be sensitive to gender issues. With the absence of more regional house of representative members, they could not put pressure on their regional house of representative members to implement action plans produced in this *semiloka*, thus reducing the effectiveness of this activity in influencing policymakers.

Rapport Building

Gaining trust from participants is extremely important especially when participants consider that discussion of a topic will endanger them. Whilst the term, roles and functions associated with local government were not familiar to most participants, they were equated with politics, which was a threatening term for Indonesian women at the grassroots. Fear of being caught and sent to prison for discussing politics haunts most women and contributed to their reluctance to discuss some topics with me. Although I am also an Indonesian woman, this did not mean that participants automatically trusted me. They were still curious about who I represented, and they worried they would not be able to answer my questions because of their low level of education. I noticed that a facilitator often played a crucial role in building trust between the women and myself. On one occasion the women were reluctant when I asked their permission to take their photos and said that they would ask their husband's permission first. It was only after the facilitator explained that the purpose of the photo is only for research, that the participants willingly had their photos taken. Finding facilitators who are familiar to and trusted by the participants is crucial in gaining their trust. Facilitators in my research came from diverse backgrounds including academia, NGOs, and CBOs. In areas where I could not find a facilitator that I knew, I contacted the head of the village and asked her/his permission. The permission from the head of village was important in the way that women did not feel threatened about participating in the FGD. For the next meeting, together with the *kepala lingkungan*, I invited the participants by visiting them

in their homes. This gave me the opportunity to meet with their spouse and observe household relations.

One of my colleagues at the University of North Sumatra, who also leads a *wirid* group (a women's group studying the Quran) in Medan willingly acted as a facilitator. Although prior to the FGD she informed the women the time for the meeting, she and I also visited these women in their homes. This gave me the opportunity to observe participants' living conditions and chat with them informally so that they could get to know me better. The facilitator played an important role in introducing me as her friend and encouraging women to speak. Being the friend of a person they trust, enabled participants to speak freely about their feelings, experiences and expectations. In most cases participants firstly ask whether the FGD would have any negative side effects that could harm them. The women wanted to protect the confidentiality of themselves and other participants and felt comfortable enough to trust me, with one woman saying 'If somebody asks what we do in the FGD, just say that we are asking for sembako (basic needs)' (RG1, October 2001).

Building rapport through friendly relationships is another effective strategy to gain women's trust and so to reduce power relations between the researcher and participants. In feminist research, equalising power relations becomes very important. The local government approach which constructs women as objects rather than subjects of development, contributed to women's passivity in discussions. From their perceptions, I was there to instruct or teach them something and they would have to listen as occurred in cases of government meetings. They were very surprised when I told them that I came to learn from them and that by sharing of experiences and information we could learn and help each other.

After I determined a site for my study, I did not immediately invite women to participate in the research. I visited them several times and the facilitator would informally introduce me as a friend or a researcher. I got to know these women and participated in their activities. For example, I participated in preparing for the

declaration of Federasi HAPSARI and in their theatre performance. I gave them my address and telephone number so that they could contact me whenever they needed or wanted to. Some of them even visited me at my home and I introduced them to members of my family. Being a friend and not a teacher to them allowed women to express their feelings, which were sometimes impossible to capture in a FGD because some women were too timid to talk in public or because they tried to avoid criticisms from other women. It also helped to reduce power gradients between myself and participants. As one woman noted: 'Although you are a lecturer, you are a friend to us because you do not intend to teach us, but instead you want to learn from us. Therefore, we want you to learn together with us' (CBO2, November 2001).

Reflexivity

My indigenous status gave me some advantages. Being able to speak Indonesian and understand some of the ethnic languages (Java and Batak language) used by participants, enabled me to communicate easily with participants compared to if I was a foreigner. A foreigner often has to hire somebody as an interpreter and that this might lead to the loss of some insights during translation. I am also familiar, to a certain degree, with the customs and traditions of the participants since participants seemed relaxed and able to express their feelings, ideas and experiences well in their mother tongue. Being an Indonesian woman, in a short time I could enter locations and chat with the participants without attracting other people's attention, which may have made participants feel uncomfortable.

As an academic involved in an NGO, access to research locations and networking was not difficult for me. I could get a research permit easily and in quite a short time. Some local government officials were either my former students or friends while at university. They did their best to have my research permit ready and provided me with documents that I needed even when they were not published yet. They provided invaluable information on the performance of local government and internal dynamics of local government by sharing with me their expectations and disappointments with the

condition of local government. I may have missed these insights had I only interviewed local government officials whom I did not know.

The political climate during the period of transition (post authoritarian regime) in Indonesia also provided opportunities for me to do secondary research since lecturers recently have been more appreciated and respected by local government. Information on recent issues regarding gender and the movement of women in Sumatra, which I could not identify or locate during my study in New Zealand, was provided by my NGO friends. Some of them willingly became my facilitators as well as partners in discussing issues related to the research topic. Having them as facilitators was helpful since both I and participants knew them so that trust and friendship between everyone was easier to establish as mentioned earlier. Through my friends I could establish networks and have easy access to locations and participants. Recognizing the possibility of biases in accessing field sites through my friends, I directly visited the prospective participants and informally explained to them about the research and asked about their willingness to participate in my research. In cases where participants felt insecure in participating in my research they would turn up to a meeting or withdraw from the research, as less than 10 per cent of women from religious groupings did.

However, being an indigenous Indonesia woman also posed dilemmas and disadvantages for me. Frequently, the male participants considered me as an example to prove that the community and government have treated women and men equally. They argued that if I, as an Indonesian woman, could gain high education, why could other women not achieve this? They felt that the community and government had provided opportunities for women to be equal to men and it was now dependent on women's capability and will to use these opportunities. Also, they sometimes considered me as a representative of women and that they felt that they had to defend themselves against me as a woman.

While familiarity can provide insights into women's lives, to a certain degree it led me to neglect crucial issues that participants considered as important. For example, I took it

for granted that getting a husband's permission to go out is just a custom for women in Indonesia, when for women at the grassroots it is typically a major struggle and an achievement if they succeed. I was raised in a family with democratic parents that treated their sons and daughters equally. My husband has been very supportive such that every responsibility and decision making occasion regarding our family is shared and discussed. Other members of my extended family have supported and encouraged me to enhance my career. As an educated woman, I come with some pre-conceptions in approaching participants and have some biases. I perceived that groups consisting of women intellectuals would have greater participation in and influence over local government than women at the grassroots, but while in the field I found that the latter are active participants in local governance in their own context. Since I came to the field with conceptions of local governance in terms of 'formal politics', I lost direction and became confused since I could not see formal interaction between women and local government. Even though in my pilot FGDs with Indonesian women in New Zealand, issues of the household had emerged, I tended to neglect this. It was only after discussions with participants that I found the focus of my research needed to be based on 'daily politics for survival of women' in order to find the locus of interaction between local government and women. Interaction with participants diverted my conception of politics not just to formal politics but included every site/sphere that women considered an appropriate site of struggle.

Another dilemma that I found was the negotiation of my position as an insider and outsider in interaction with participants in the research process. Although I am an Indonesian woman, my background and experiences have to a certain degree made me an outsider to certain participants. I could not help being closer (an insider) to some groups/participants than the others. While to participants from the *perwiridan* (women reading Quran) groups I tended to be an outsider, to the members of SPI (community based group) I felt I was an insider. I frequently felt tense when conducting FGDs with the *perwiridan* groups since I am a Christian. This tense feeling derived from my awareness of not wanting to offend them and from my unfamiliarity with these groups. I tried hard not to offend them in the way I spoke and dressed and with the topics of

discussion I raised. However, I think there was more than a difference in religion which made me an outsider since I could openly hold discussions with the SPI members who are also Moslems. With the members of SPI, I shared a common vision about empowering women. The philosophy of sisterhood in their groups and their willingness to learn together with me contributed to my position as an insider in these groups.

Research as Empowerment

The basic philosophy of my research was that the process of research should be empowering both to participants and the researcher. I was obviously inspired by my participants' experiences and strategies in dealing with so many obstacles to equalise gender relations. Their experiences have inspired me to look persistently and creatively for any available sites and opportunities that can be used in engendering local governance, and they deepened my understanding of crucial gender issues in local governance.

The custom of some NGOs to give money to the people they have asked to attend meetings caused some participants to think that they would receive some money from me. At first I felt guilty for not giving money to the participants. But then I realised that development is not only about money but more importantly it is about the enhancement of people's capability to determine, control and benefit from processes to improve their well-being.

In diverse ways through sharing of information the research empowered my participants. At the grassroots level, I shared information on local government institutions that related to women's interests. For example, in *perwiridan* meetings participants discussed much about corruption in their localities, stating that they were powerless, but I informed them that they could directly report corruption to the Mayor through a telephone line which was recently established to receive complaints from the community. I also described how women's community based organisations in North Sumatra and women's organisation in other countries where women who also live in

poverty do have an impact over and above the community level. The *perwiridan* members expressed that it would be very good for them if they also had such groups in their area.

By disseminating information on the rights of people based on Indonesian constitutions, the UU 22/1999 (Law on Regional Autonomy), and the roles and responsibilities of local government institutions, I raised the consciousness of participants and motivated participants to participate in local governance. ‘...that’s why when *mbak* (sister) Yanty chatted with us about government at the village level, we were very excited. We need to know what the village is, the function of village, how and where people can have responsibility. People are yet to know these things’ (CBO4, November 2001). Women at the grassroots became eager and motivated to be elected as a member of VRB (village consultative body which functions as a legislative body at the community level) since I told them that based on Law No.22/1999 everybody regardless of their education can be elected as member of VRB as long as the people vote for them. This is in contrast to the message being put forward by local government officials who suggested that those who are elected to VRB are only those with high education, making women feel they cannot participate.

I also informed participants that based on Inmendagri (Instructions of the Interior Minister), wives of the heads of villages no longer would automatically become the head of PKK (the Family Welfare Development Program) at their village. Even among local government officials, members of parliament, and NGOs this information has yet to be circulated. From the research, I found that sometimes local government officers seem to neglect women because they do not have information and understanding as to what gender and empowerment of women is. Therefore, I found it was important to introduce gender issues to local government officials during interview sessions.

In the process of conscientising my research participants I found it difficult to avoid conflict and to be neutral. Empowerment in terms of transforming inequity in gender relations challenges deeply rooted patriarchy, thus igniting reactions from those who

have benefited from unequal gender relations. The case below is one example of how I came into conflict by advocating on behalf of women. Members of SPI (Serikat Perempuan Independen/ Independent Women's Union) expressed their intention to declare the formation of their federation at the university campus. They explained to me that before knowing me as their friend they never even imagined that they would be able to 'put their foot' on the university grounds. Having no or low education, to conduct an activity within a university is a matter of pride for them. Also strategically, by declaring the formation of their woman's federation in the university, there would be more publicity for their action. I extended their wish to my faculty, the Faculty of Social and Political Science, with the hope that my colleagues in this faculty would be enthusiastic since providing community service is one of the functions of university. In fact, I was very surprised and upset with the reaction of my colleagues. None of them seemed to be interested. This discussion involved three male colleagues and I brought one of my female colleagues who then went out in the midst of an argument because she told me she was very angry with the reaction from our male colleagues. I later forwarded my plan to the Department of Politics. Not wanting to offend me as his friend, the head of Politics politely asked me to propose this to the Sociology Department. A male colleague added that these women frequently do demonstrations and that it is dangerous for the university to become associated with an NGO since this will invite negative reaction from the government. He also added that these women would come to the university barefoot and on trucks. I tried to remind my colleagues of the function of a university and explained that these women were not asking for any funds, all they asked for is cooperation and recognition. I also argued that if the Department of Politics was willing to provide funds to train members of parliament, they should not be reluctant to cooperate with women as members of a community based group. I was really upset when one of the male colleagues denigrated these women by saying that these women are either former communist party members (GERWANI) or prostitutes. That was the first time in my life that I felt offended for being a woman.

I, then, invited and accompanied the members of SPI to directly book a venue at the university rectorate. I did not want to book it by myself because I wanted them to be independent, so that next time they would know how to have access to the university. The declaration of the formation of this women's federation (Federasi HAPSARI) was successfully held in the University of North Sumatra. This event opened my eyes to the great challenges women at the grassroots experience in their efforts to organize themselves and gain recognition since even in the university with educated people (the colleagues I mentioned above all have pursued their Masters degree) women organising themselves are perceived in a derogatory fashion.

Advocacy can also take the form of informing and making known to male participants about the heavy burdens women have, such as informing men as participants why women seem invisible in governance because of their traditional domestic responsibilities. In general, male participants are not aware of and do not appreciate women's contribution to the family, community and state. Women's invisibility is considered as women's choice, with the belief that women lack interest and capabilities to be involved in local governance. On some occasions, the men I spoke to became very defensive, but more frequently they were genuinely surprised to learn that women do greatly contribute to society and that their participation should not be neglected. Sharing jokes and explaining about women's contribution I found as the most effective way to reduce the tension and to prevent male participants from stopping our discussion.

Empowerment of both men and women is very important since it will create more problems for women if the process excludes men. In empowering research it is important to find ways to transform men to be allies in equalising gender relations by sharing of information rather than considering them as enemies. Raising women's consciousness while not sensitising men could, conversely, put women in the difficult position of severe conflict with men.

Summary

This chapter has discussed the application of research methods in the field through the adoption of several techniques to maximise the benefits of the research to participants and to ensure the trustworthiness of data collected. Since the process of research itself is very important, techniques and approaches used should be sensitive to and address power relations that exist not only research participants within each FGD but also between researcher and participants, thus, allowing greater participation of research participants in the production of knowledge.

The participatory techniques used in the field while allowing for the emergence of rich data which may capture the diversity of ideas from participants, also consumed a lot of both the researcher's and participants' time. This may raise concern on the possibility of the exploitation of research participants since the researcher has taken up participants' time without giving something back to them. In this research I found that by using techniques which appreciate local knowledge, culture and understand the structure of power relations between researcher and participants and among participants, research can be empowering and beneficial for both participants and researchers. Reciprocity in research should be extended to include encouragement, sharing of knowledge and experiences, self and group consciousness raising, and empowerment that emerge during the research process through diverse forms of interactions which occur during research.

Feminist, participatory research was useful in gaining insights into the unexplored themes of gender and local governance in North Sumatra since it allowed my research participants, especially women, to determine issues/themes of local governance that they considered most relevant to them. Forcing participants to speak on topics which are alien to them, while strengthening power relations between researcher and participants, is also one form of exploitation. Therefore, trusting in my participants' knowledge and capability in analysing their situation enabled me to capture the diverse subtle strategies women at the grassroots used to open up spaces for women and to participate in local governance.

Feminist, participatory research is both personal and political. In this research, my role cannot be limited to that of outsider but extended to active engagement in the lives of participants. This research was political, in the way that I represented women's voices to policymakers and other stakeholders in local governance by informing them about problems women face, explaining why women seem to be reluctant to actively engage in local governance and describing women's contributions to the community. Representing participants' voices especially groups who are socially silenced is certainly not an easy task and may lead to conflict. In this kind of research, the researcher must be open to the potential of conflict. Appreciation of local knowledge, culture and understanding of the structure of power relations between researcher and participants and among participants significantly contributes to effectiveness of techniques used in managing the conflict persuasively rather than confrontationally.

Participatory techniques and approaches are not only useful in researching people at the grassroots, but can be applied to the elite/policy makers. Building a bridge between women and local government officials/policymakers and NGOs by bringing them together to share their experiences, discuss, analyse and find solutions to the problems is both empowering to women and beneficial for local government in the way that it builds mutual understanding. This can hopefully lead to partnerships between women and local government useful for engendering local governance in North Sumatra.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE POLITICS OF GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE INDONESIAN STATE

Introduction

This chapter discusses the evolution of gender ideology which leads to the differentiation between women's and men's social and political roles and positions in Indonesia. After briefly tracing how colonialism contributed to the creation of unequal gender relations, this chapter will elaborate on how the New Order⁵ regime extended and politicised colonial gender relationships by intensively reproducing the images of 'good women' merely as mothers and wives in its development policies and strategies so as to use this gender ideology to serve the regime's interests. Discussion on the impact of Reformation on women reveals both the legacy of the New Order gender ideology as well as women's responses in challenging this ideology. Finally, this chapter explores problems facing the national mechanism for women and gender mainstreaming in Indonesia and highlights the urgency for the national mechanism for women to re-formulate its strategies in dealing with women and agencies at the local level due to the changes created by decentralisation in Indonesia.

⁵ New Order refers to a regime in Indonesia, headed by Soeharto who established office in 1966 after the taking power from the regime called the Old Order. In 1998 Soeharto was overthrown by the people and was replaced by the Habibie regime.

Colonial Period

Literature on colonialism in Indonesia reveals how colonialism has contributed to women's subordination (De-Stuers, 1960; Gouda, 1998; Kipp, 1998; Alexander and Alexander, 2001). The Dutch government used a Western ideal image of family to justify its colonial strategies and practices. In its ethical welfare policies, the Dutch government prioritised the programs for men rather than women (Gouda, 1999). The Dutch perceived men as being primary breadwinners and strengthened this 'ideal' through their policies. Regardless of the reality of women's significant role in the economic welfare of the family through their public activities, the Dutch perceived the indigenous women's role as being destructive to the creation of a stable family, European style, in which women stay at home and perform their roles as good housewives. This was reflected in an article in a Dutch-language women's magazine as follows:

The mother in the village slogs and slaves away. She carried loads on her back as heavy as lead; in the middle of a pitch-black night she pounds bran or corn so she can trudge the enormous distance to a market far away, where she sells her pathetic products in order to earn few extra cents...if only she would stay at home and learn to care better for her children by fulfilling her housewifely obligations, then enough time would remain to earn additional income by doing some light agricultural work or, even more desirable, by spinning, weaving, or making *batik*, *tritik*, *djoemplat*, or *plangi* (various ornate forms of cloth) and pottery or baskets (quoted in Gouda, 1999:250).

The widespread poverty of the colonised community was considered the result of their failure to follow the Western image of a stable family in which women are housewives and men are providers (Gouda, 1999). Both men and women were held responsible for this failure. Through their public activities in providing food and sustenance for their families, women were blamed for neglecting their roles as housewives, thus contributing to a 'loose family life', while men in Java or on other islands of the archipelago were conceived as lacking the same kind of 'inner impulse', 'serious determination', or 'sense of duty' as men in the West to provide for their families, resulting in hardships women and children experienced in their struggle to survive on their own (Gouda, 1998:251).

The coloniser's assumption of the superiority of Western values surrounding gender relationships, has misperceived and neglected the power women had in their traditional settings (De Steurs, 1960; Kipp, 1998). The study on Dutch missionaries in Karo⁶ pointed to women's control and rejection of their husband's conversion to Christianity as contributing to the missionaries' failure in their evangelistic mission (Kipp, 1998). Confident that European Christian women were already emancipated compared to women in Asia, Dutch missionaries tried to change the existing traditional gender relationship of the indigenous Karo community with Western Christian values which posited women's role as housekeepers. This was challenged by Karo women who considered missionaries' wives with their domesticity as women with no work, 'just sitting' at home while Karo women, worked in the fields carried water, firewood, or pounded rice (Kipp, 1998:213). For Karo women, work was compatible with marriage and family life. Thus, a life of domesticity was not in Karo women's character.

The colonial government also restricted indigenous women's participation in politics. The Dutch government refused women's right to vote in the People's Council in Minahasa (De-Stuers, 1960). A statement from a Dutch member of the People's Council argued that 'Private family life rather than the public sphere constitutes the proper domain for women to develop their gifts and talents' (Gouda 1999:252). This was in contradiction with the *adat* (customary law and tradition) which allowed women to have an equal position to that of men (De-Stuers 1960). Pointing to the case of Minangkabau and Minahasa, where women have been actively involved in municipal councils where they were heard and considered, de-Steurs (1960:41) contended that women in Indonesia had always had the right to vote. He further argued that 'in general *adat* allowed the woman a position equal to that of the man. In public affairs, the woman's influence was by no means inferior to that of a man'.

⁶ Karo is a region in North Sumatra where the majority of its population is Karo which is one ethnic group in Indonesia.

Colonialism contributed to the marginality of women in decision making at the local level by producing policies that contradict customary law in Indonesia (De-Stuers, 1960; Soewondo, 1984; Sullivan, 1992; Wieringa, 1995). For example, despite the significant position of women in the Minahasa tradition, Dutch rulers rejected women's right to vote in the election of the People's Council of Minahasa, which, in the context of administrative decentralisation, was established as a consultative body in 1918 (De-Stuers, 1960: 95). Dutch rulers were inconsistent in their attitudes towards women as heads of local government. While there was a female mayor in a district of Minahasa, in some parts of Java the Dutch prohibited women to be elected as heads of villages and in other parts of Java the Dutch allowed the customary law to be used in deciding whether a woman could be elected as head of a village (Soewondo, 1984).

Wieringa (1995: 249-250) using the case of Minangkabau, which she perceives as a matriarchal community, argues that land tenure and migration policy produced by the Dutch abolished the centrality of women in decision making at the local level. Based on traditional *adat*, Minangkabau women have a central position in decision making in the *nagari* (cluster of villages) councils at the local level due to their rights over the land. 'Although men are the public representatives of the members of their lineage, no decision can be taken without the consent of the women who collectively own the communal property' (Wieringa, 1995:243). Through its land tenure and migration policy, the Dutch has encouraged men to migrate and strengthened men's role as wage earners, thus increasing women's financial dependence on men. While previously men would manage their time to work between their wives' and sisters' fields, due to increased men's migration, housework responsibilities were left to women. These policies curbed the power base of women, their control over communal land, thus contributing to the marginality of women in decision making at the local level.

However, the high position of women in *adat* is to be considered cautiously due to the vast differences among ethnic groups in Indonesia. While the traditional *adat* of Minangkabau, mentioned above, provides women with a central position in decision making in local public forum, Batak women do not have as central a position. In the

traditional patriarchal community of Batak, men hold the power to make decisions regarding the village. Although decision making at the local level was produced 'democratically', since decisions were decided by the majority in a council meeting which could be attended by all community members, it also discriminated against women since only married adult males have voice in the government (Loeb, 1972:38-39). Women may have their voice heard in the council and even influence decision making but only if it appeared to be similar to the opinion of an elder shaman. The rigorous patrilineal *adat* of the Batak, which perceived women as the property of the family, is identified as the source of the denial of women's right as members of the community (Loeb, 1972; Rodenburg, 1997). In the traditional *adat* of Batak, a woman is seen 'as a child the property of her father, as a woman the property of her husband, and after his death the property of his male relatives' (Loeb, 1972:49). Thus, '...whatever 'power' (or more accurately, influence) women have is ultimately subject to the power of men within households and male dominated institutions in the wider society' (Rodenburg, 1997:203).

Although women participated in and contributed to struggles towards Indonesian independence, they were immediately neglected and marginalised in the further process of nation state building in Indonesia by isolating women's role to household and social related social issues (Wieringa, 1999). Both the Old⁷ and New Order regimes in post independence Indonesia mobilised women for their own interests based on women's roles as wives and mothers. Although during the Old Order regime national politics and political parties limited women's participation to women's issues, at least women's organisations had more independence in identifying women's interests and in determining their activities (Aripurnami, 1999; Wieringa, 1999). The New Order has been more persistent in restricting women's participation by ideologising women's ideal

⁷ Old Order is used to refer to a regime in post independence (1945-1965) Indonesia which was led by the first President of Indonesia, Soekarno.

roles which were limited in accordance with their perceived *kodrat*⁸ (natural talents) (Suryakusuma, 1996; Dzuhayatin, 2001). Through the imposition of gendered responsibilities as citizens, the New Order regime had placed women as second class citizens by imposing the gendered responsibilities as citizens as well as by placing women's interests under the community and state's interests (Anderson, 1996; Blackburn, 1999).

The section below will look at how the New Order regime continued and extended the above Western colonial ideology of household relations which emphasises the primary role of women as housewives in its development programmes and institutions.

Women in Indonesia's Development Trajectory under the New Order

Pembangunan or development became a powerful rhetoric during the New Order regime in Indonesia. Growth, equity and stability were the stated aims of the *Trilogi pembangunan* (development trilogy). And certainly a number of important achievements were made. UNDP (2001) notes Indonesian achievement in human development by pointing out the reduction of infant mortality from 159 to 45 per thousand live births, and the drop in the adult illiteracy rate from 61% to 12% during the 1960 to 1999 period. Indonesia's economic growth has also contributed to progress in gender related issues and overcoming gender disparity in Indonesia.

However, this progress has not been followed by improvement in women's participation in strategic public positions as reflected in Indonesia's gender empowerment measurement (GEM)⁹ which is the lowest (49.5) among ASEAN countries. Based on a recent study by BAPPENAS/UNICEF, the UNDP (2002) pointed to the existence of

⁸ The perceived women's *kodrat* includes biological attributes such as giving birth, breast feeding, and menstruation and is frequently extended to household chores which are deemed to be the appropriate roles of women.

⁹ GEM measures key areas of economic and political participation and decision making (UNDP 2001:6).

paternalistic culture, which considers men as the primary decision makers, both in society generally and within government institutions, as contributing to the continuing lack of political will to address gender sensitive issues.

The rights of women in Indonesia have been expressively stipulated in the 1945 Constitution (Article 27) which states that 'all citizens have equal status before the law'. Indonesia has also ratified some international documents on women such as: the ILO Remuneration Convention No. 100/1951 adopted under Law No.80/1957 which pledges equal pay for women and men for equal work; UN Convention on Political Rights of Women adopted under Law No.68/1968; CEDAW (Convention to Eliminate Discrimination Against Women) adopted under Law No.7/1984, UN CEDAW (in 1990).

Indonesian development policy has also incorporated and recognized the role of women in development. Since the 1970s the GBHN¹⁰ (Broad Outline of State Policy) as the basic reference point in conducting planning and development in Indonesia has recognised the importance of women's role in development as wives and mothers by focusing on women's reproductive and income earning role in the family. The 1973 GBHN mentioned that women's role and participation in development was placed in relation to their role in the family. The focus was on improving the performance of the national Family Planning Program to achieve the welfare of the family without explicitly mentioning the welfare of women. In GBHN 1978, women's role was extended to include all aspects of development while still emphasizing the primacy of women's responsibility for the family's welfare. In this national development policy guideline women become a separate category. The regime also officially described

¹⁰ GBHN (Broad Outline of State Policy) is formulated every 5 years and functions in directing the five-year development plan in Indonesia.

women's role through the *Panca Dharma Wanita* (Five Women's Obligations) as (1) supporting her husband's career and duties;(2) procreating for the nation; (3) caring for and rearing the children; (4) being a good housekeeper; (5) being a guardian of the community (Sunindyo, 1996).

Still related to the primacy of family welfare, the GBHN 1988 extended women's role in all aspects of development in relation to women's role in the family. In this national document, the terms *kodrat* and *martabat* were first formulated. *Kodrat and martabat* (natural talents and proclivities), *peran ganda* (women's dual role) were buzzwords in the New Order development policies, part of the rethoric suggesting that women and men had had equal opportunities in development in Indonesia. The state idealised women's multiple role in national development as wives and mothers as the consequence of their *kodrat* in nurturing and servicing the family (Robinson, 2000). This role was propagandized as the most significant contribution women could make to development considering women's role as agents in preserving the society's norms and values in achieving success for the national development programs and nation building.

The GBHN 1993 acknowledged women's persistent subordination in Indonesia by stating that women's still have subordinate status and roles in society, thus, they are not yet equal partners (GBHN 1993). It also placed emphasis on the significance of creating a conducive social and cultural environment to improve women's position and dignity, thus, enabling women to enhance their role in society in harmony with their role in the family. For the first time *mitra sejajar pria* (women and men as equal partners) was mentioned in Indonesia's national policy document. Although the terms *kodrat* and *martabat* were continuously used, this policy reflected a growing recognition of the importance of involving men and the community in sharing domestic responsibilities. However, as Sen (1998:44-45) argues, the concept of *mitra sejajar* was based on a 'very selective inclusion of domestic responsibility' in sharing responsibilities only in child rearing, while not mentioning the sharing of other domestic activities.

Through the implementation of the Love the Mother Movement¹¹ (*Gerakan Sayang Ibu/GSI*) the government attempted to decrease the Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) to 225 per 100,000 by the year 2000. This approach has been the first national movement to involve men, the society in general, NGOs and government sectoral institutions to be responsible for reducing the maternal mortality rate. However, Indonesia's MMR remains unchanged at 390 per 100,000 live births since 1994 (UNDP 1999) which was exceptionally high among the ASEAN countries.

Despite the changing Indonesian policy development statements, women's participation in development was persistently based on their traditional and biological role as wives and mothers. Women's dedication as wives and mothers was glorified as an ideal picture of a 'good woman'. A Japanese study on the situation and position of women in Indonesia contends that being a housewife is the only important role of women, with men regarded as the household heads. While women's responsibility in the management of household finances is widely accepted by the state and community in general, women's contribution in supporting the welfare and livelihood of the family is yet to be given rightful recognition (JICA, 2000).

All these development guidelines emphasise women's responsibilities while neglecting the facilities women need to be able to participate fully as well as to benefit equally with men from the development process. Increasing women's roles to include the family, community and national development without adequate supportive facilities means that women's choices become more limited while their burden increases. In these development guidelines, women's role in development is always situated under the category of community. Through this categorisation the government has both reduced its obligations and costs in servicing individual women while at the same time has

¹¹GSI was declared by the President in 1996 as a national movement which was aimed at lowering the maternal mortality rate.

created women's subordination since women become dependent on the community (Blackburn, 1999).

State Corporatism and Women: Politicising Gender in the New Order Era

The Western colonial ideology of household relations which emphasised the primary role of women as housewives was continued and extended by the New Order regime in development programs and institutions. Based on the ideology of *Ibuism*¹², an idea which sees women's primary role as mothers, a woman should look after her family, a group, a class, a company or the state, without demanding power or prestige in return (Nieuwenhuis, 1987). This homogenising jargon of *Ibuism* which was used by the New Order regime to construct femininity was also based on the Javanese *priyayi* (royal class) division of gender roles (Dzuhayatin, 2001:265). This ideology implies a clear division of roles based on sex in which 'Bapak [father] has the authority and prestige, whereas the Ibu [mother] acts' (Nieuwenhuis 1987:44). Suryakusuma (1996:101) calls the New Order's gender ideology 'State Ibuism' in which women were defined as 'appendages and companions to their husbands, as procreators of the nation, as mothers and educators of children, as housekeepers, and as members of Indonesian society'.

The New Order's gender ideology which subordinated women was also applied within development institutions for women in Indonesia. During the New Order, the government only recognised PKK (Family Welfare Development Program)¹³ and Dharma Wanita (Women's Obligation) as women's organisations. Along with the abolishment of PKI (the Indonesian Communist Party) in 1965, women's organisations which focused on women's rights and political issues were banned, except for PKK and

¹² *Ibu* means mother.

¹³ PKK is an organisation for rural women which facilitates development programs conducted by grassroots women.

Dharma Wanita which were used and supported by government in reaching out to women at the grassroots (Sunindyo 1996).

PKK was aimed at increasing rural women's participation in development. At the beginning of its implementation as a welfare movement to help alleviate hunger and poverty in communities through training on home economics activities, PKK was successful through cooperation among government, wives of government officials and women volunteers. By participating in PKK, women as volunteers, who previously only conducted activities at home, found a sense of identity. The uniform and special pins used in conducting their programs motivated these women (Bianpoen, 1996). However, the success did not apply to all regions. The main problems were that of differences between social conditions in regions and the lack of people who could translate the centrally formulated PKK program to suit their region's needs.

Up to now the middle class character of PKK has obstructed its capability to reach out to village women as their targets. The officials of PKK who are mostly middle class women have had difficulty communicating their programs to women at the grassroots level, as evidenced by the following dialogue between myself (Researcher) and a North Sumatra's PKK official (Participant):

(Researcher): *What is the problem facing PKK in empowering women?*

(Participant): *PKK is aimed at welfare...Family Welfare Empowerment...a new paradigm after the national meeting. It is aimed to empower women to enhance potentials in themselves, their family and environment. We find a problem of human resources since we have to start from the very basic level, from families in villages, not in cities where they already have good intellectual ability. We have to use simple language. Also the people do not think what we do is relevant to them. Maybe it is our own fault...because they have not felt the benefit of our activities, yet. Especially now everybody has already been too busy fulfilling their basic needs although they should know that we try to improve their economic wellbeing. They do not understand yet.*

(Researcher): *What do you think causes this misunderstanding?*

(Participant): *Communication, maybe it's the language. Previously we have been top down, so they did not understand [what we were trying to achieve]. If the*

programs have been conducted...completed...we do not concern anymore. We are now trying to be more bottom-up (PKK, October 2001).

The implementation of PKK programmes was frequently made possible at the expense of the women (Wolf, 1992; Sullivan, 1994; Primariantari, 1998; Putri, 1998; Kompas, 1999). Rural women have to contribute their time, material and energy in implementing PKK programmes which often reflects more of the civil servants' and their wives' needs and interests rather than local women's. For example, when a government official visits a location to inspect development programs in an area, the members of the PKK will be asked to provide facilities or to create a situation that will please the official who will give a positive evaluation of the local development achievement (Field notes, 15/12/2001). In addition, through the PKK, the government has attempted to increase women's productivity as housewives as reflected in its programmes which focus more on the domestic sphere such as : cake decorating, sewing, flower arranging, and make up rather than on women as producers. PKK has also been accused of encouraging consumerism among women by selling cosmetics and cooking utensils to women (Primariantari 1998). Because of these activities, there is a wide spread cynical understanding that PKK is really the abbreviation for *Perempuan Kurang Kerjaan* (women who have no work) (Field notes, 15/12/2001).

The New Order regime also used PKK to mobilize rural women as instruments in implementing development programs. The success of the population policy (Family Planning Programme) in Indonesia which has received much international praise was inseparable from the achievements of PKK. PKK was responsible for implementing this policy. In its activities to support the government's family planning program, the PKK emphasised the ideology of *kodrat and martabat*. Thus, the roles of women as wives and mothers obligate women to use contraceptive methods¹⁴ while not mentioning the same obligations for men. Therefore, this family planning programme has been criticised for focusing on reducing population growth while ignoring women's needs

¹⁴ Contraceptive methods include, among others, tubectomy, pills, and injections.

and interests (Sullivan, 1994; Aripurnami, 1999). While women were left without adequate information regarding the family planning programme and its methods, government family planning officials also frequently ignored women's complaints about the effects of methods of family planning on their health (Aripurnami 1999). The regime used coercion and sometimes force more than positive rewards in implementing the programme. Those who rejected the programme were accused of being communists. Through its population policy the New Order regime intervened in private life, controlling and taking over women's reproduction rights and putting them under the state's control.

Although in the official statements PKK was popularised as an example of a grassroots development programme which was initiated by grassroots women in accordance with their interests and needs, the programmes and the structure of PKK were mostly determined from above. The PKK structure was integrated into all levels of government from central to local levels and it thus resembles the hierarchy of government institutions. In village and urban neighbourhoods PKK was included as an element of the LSD (Village Social Institution). Sullivan (1994:162-163) describes PKK as 'functional units of local government, whose main task is to implement the Applied Family Welfare Program and its many projects at the neighbourhood and village levels'.

The Five Duties of Women of *Dharma Wanita* and the Ten Point Programme¹⁵ of PKK which both function as the ideological and technical base for implementation of PKK programmes, all focus on women's domestic roles as wives and mothers. With the ascribed additional women's responsibilities as the 'household expert on modern hygiene and nutrition, household's proselytizer of development-oriented values and attitudes and state policy and as environmentalists'; the Ten Point Program of PKK was

¹⁵ Ten Point Program of PKK is: 'Comprehension and practical application of the national philosophy and state ideology *Pancasila* (The Five Principles); mutual self-help; nutrition; clothing; housing and home economics; education and craftsmanship; primary health care; promotion of cooperatives; protection and conservation of the environment; appropriate domestic planning' (Sullivan 1994:133).

too expensive considering the reality of poverty facing women (Sullivan 1994:133). Through their free labour, women have contributed to local government in implementing their obligations. Hence, the structure and programmes of PKK reflect both the hegemonic and patriarchal system, obstructing local women's initiatives while mobilising rural woman for development projects which frequently do not accord with women's needs. This top down approach, as Wolf (1992:71) has succinctly argued, 'discourages any active political involvement as well as activities that might evolve in participation of poor women or the creation of self-help groups'. One study (Kompas, 1999) points out that women who are involved actively in PKK have lower consciousness of the state's domination and exploitation of women than those outside the PKK.

After the 1998 Reformation in Indonesia, the PKK/*Pendidikan Kesejahteraan Keluarga* (Family Welfare Movement) was changed into PKK/*Pemberdayaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga* (Family Welfare Empowerment). However, the structure mostly remains the same, except for the village level where there is opportunity for women, other than the wives of heads of villages, to be elected as the head of PKK.

The strength of the patriarchal system is even more obvious in other women's organisations such as Dharma Wanita (Women's Obligation organisation) whose members are women civil servants and the wives of civil servants. Whilst the target of PKK is village women, Dharma Wanita was aimed at civil servants' wives. The structure of this organisation mirrors the women's husbands' ranks in government bureaucracy so that the wives of the bosses of the civil service units are the heads of Dharma Wanita. The structure of Dharma Wanita, which resembles those of their husbands hierarchical position, does not accord with the structure of some traditional societies within Indonesia. For example, it contradicts the traditional *adat* of Minangkabau since as Wieringa (1995:265) argues 'The matrilinear Minang *adat* classified women according to their position in the matriclans; appendages of their men, but members of a society which granted them important economic, social and political rights'.

Dharma Wanita strengthens women's subordination by emphasising women's primary obligation towards family and state through their role in supporting their husband's career as *pendamping suami* (their husband's companion). Sen (1998:42) contends:

Discourses and practices of New Order policy constructed women as biologically specified reproductive workers. Given the structures of Dharma Wanita and PKK, women's only legitimate access to state power was as wives of powerful male functionaries of the state.

Thus, the New Order perceived 'men as first class citizens and women as second class citizens who have to depend on men' (Anderson, 1996:50-51). Women were seen as appendages of men and as such, they were not full citizens of Indonesia. The regime also always related women's citizenship to their membership in the community due to its lack of political will and ability to allocate resources to deal with the consequences of treating women as equal individuals (Blackburn 1999:191) argues that 'By treating women in a collective rather than on individual basis, the state transferred the protection of women (such as widows, divorced and elderly women) to the community, thus, contributed to the subordination of women'. Hence, contradicting the officially stated 'separate but equal' character of gender ideology in Indonesia, the New Order gender ideology has been evidently 'separate and unequal' (Sullivan 1994:174).

Whilst the civil servants were controlled through their membership in the Golkar (Functional Party) and KORPRI (Indonesian Civil Servant Corp), at least through the obligatory cut of their salary given to Golkar through KOPRI, the state increased its control and hegemony over the family by placing women as subservient to husbands, thus ensuring that components of the society would act in line with the regime policies. As Dzuhayatin (2001:260) argues:

By preserving the primary role of women as housewives the state could control through their husbands, who were in turn controlled through their public activities by the state. Through such a policy, the regime was able to limit women's participation in public life without the use of direct coercion of physical restrictions.

Thus, household relations have been effectively used by the state to subordinate and mobilise women which provides a mechanism of the state to control the society as a whole.

By emphasising the concept of *kodrat* and *martabat*, it is clear that the New Order has continuously produced and institutionalized an ideal image of Indonesian women, whose role is centered around the family. This gender ideology combined with a repressive capitalist regime during the New Order controlled and suppressed women (Pakpahan, 1996; Suryakusuma, 1996; Robinson, 1998; Sunindyo, 1998; Wieringa, 1999). It has not only domesticated women, but also leads to marginalisation of women in the labour force. By emphasising on women's reproductive role, the regime has neglected problems facing women in their involvement in productive activities. In her study, Widawati (2001) reveals the severe living conditions of female laborers in Jakarta. In order to support their families, these women have to migrate to the city and live in terrible conditions in slum areas. The requirement by the government to have a KTP (identification card) restricts these women's movements and increases their burdens since once a year they have to return to their home (villages) to renew their KTP. Despite the lack of facilities from government, these women gave up some of their time to participate in the general election which they considered as their obligation rather than as their right as citizens.

The regime consciously and intentionally controlled all processes of policy formulation and used them to exploit women as instruments of production to accrue benefits such as economic growth: 'By reminding women of their obligation to be loyal and obedient, quiet, accepting, and unprotesting, the state can control women's labor and keep their wages down' (Wolf, 1992:72). As labourers, Indonesian women receive 50% lower wages than male labourers. This implies that Indonesian women have the lowest purchasing power among Southeast Asian countries such that in order to buy 1 kg of rice, Indonesian women labourers have to work 221 minutes, Malaysia 105 minutes, Philippine 60 minutes and Thailand 55 minutes. Literature on women labourers who work abroad argues that these women were perceived as merely export commodities

without legal protection (Harris 1997; Primariantari, 1998). These women have contributed to development by sacrificing themselves to work abroad and sending money to support their family in Indonesia. Yet, when they faced harassment, violence and violation of their rights in overseas countries, they were left to defend themselves. During the New Order era, women in the workforce here considered as 'piles of industrious human bodies', or as 'machines with strength and working capacity that can be regulated with protein and calories in order to produce maximum outputs in the interest of development' (Primariantari, 1998:49).

Although in their establishment both the PKK and Dharma Wanita, were acknowledged by the New Order as major organisations for women's participation in development, they were supposed not to be politically affiliated. However, they were frequently used to gain political support for the regime. The New Order has changed autonomous women's organisations and activities into development programs which were a part of New Order politics in mobilising women for the interests of the regime (Putri, 1998; Wieringa, 1999; Robinson, 2000). As a result, Indonesian women have been alienated from independent involvement in the political process and lack political participation. A study by BAPPENAS (*Badan Perencana Pembangunan Nasional* or National Development Planning Board) reveals the limited involvement of Indonesian women in policy making in the legislative, executive and judicative institutions (Kompas, 1999). Women are majority in Indonesia. In the 1999 election, 58% of voters were women. However, women's representation in all public offices remains marginal as can be seen in Table 1 (page 145).

This study also found that decision makers have not been gender sensitive, because they have failed to take into consideration differences between women and men's needs and experiences in formulating development programmes.

However, it is misleading to perceive that the marginalisation of women in Indonesia is not being challenged by women themselves. Women use various strategies in struggling for their needs and interests in the midst of the repressive patriarchal system. The

emergence of various women's NGOs in Indonesia during the 1970s was inseparable from the increasing international attention paid to women as reflected in the first international conference on women in Mexico (1975) and followed by the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women (1985) which was agreed upon by all members of the UN including Indonesia. During the 1970s, women's NGOs and community organisations in Indonesia in general addressed problems facing women to participating in development based on the WID approach, yet they were not gender conscious in their programs, thus they tended to neglect addressing unequal gender relations at the root of women's subordination. Gender inequality was considered the logical consequence of women's *kodrat* (Triwijati, 1996; Fakhri, 1998). However, since the 1980s, NGOs in Indonesia have begun to persistently struggle to empowering women in the development process. They have done this through programs that will increase women's bargaining position, rather by increasing women's status based merely on women's productivity as mothers (Harsono, 1997; Dzuhayatin, 2001; Mas'ood et al., 2001).

In the 1990s women's organisations increasingly challenged the construction of femininity by the New Order regime. For example, in 1995 a group of women demonstrated in front of Kartini's¹⁶ grave demanding the abolition of PKK and Dharma Wanita. They were arrested on charges of acting against the national ideology of Pancasila (Dzuhayatin, 2001:262). Perceiving that obligations expected of Dharma Wanita were merely add their burdens, some working women start to oppose their bosses's wives instructions (Sen, 1998:43). In the field, I also found not only resentment to PKK and Dharma Wanita among women, but also among male local government officials as illustrated in the interview excerpts below:

¹⁶ Kartini is a heroic female figure who struggle to improve women's position in Indonesia through education.

(Researcher): *What do you think about the PKK?*

(Participant): *Unhealthy system...because that a woman who is the wife of the head of local government, should become the head of PKK, when she does not know how to deliver a speech...I disagree with the structure. Because she is the wife of the head of local government, my wife has to become the head of both PKK and Dharma Wanita. When will we meet? I have been busy, and so is she. Sometimes I have to travel away when she is still out in the field. I know for sure that she is not the best for the job among the other women in the region. Why should she be the one who becomes the leader? This is all because of the system. I have asked her, why should you...she answered that it is the rules. There was also a case where a wife of the head of village had to organise a celebration of KB (family planning program), while she already has been very busy with her 7 daughters and 9 boys.*

(Researcher): *Would you mind if your wife did not have an important position in PKK and Dharma Wanita?*

(Participant): *I would be very happy. I know for sure. My wife told me herself that she was forced into these positions. For example, my wife is the head of one of health organisation in North Sumatra. Why don't they look for a doctor or from the financial aspect a businesswoman? This is because they perceived my wife as the wife of the head of local government, so they chose my wife. In fact this provides an opportunity for KKN [Korupsi Kolusi Nepotisme or corruption, cronyism, nepotism]. I know for sure that my wife is used in the case when they need to raise funds so that they will gain fund. That's KKN isn't it? My wife goes to the kadis (heads of local government agencies), and because she is my wife the kadis will give her some money when in fact the kadis also have to look for the money. It's wrong again. Forcing the wives of government officials to occupy certain structural positions is not a way to empower women.*

(Researcher): *Do you think the other officials have similar opinions? Or maybe it is only your personal opinion?*

(Participant): *Oh no...I frequently speak personally to other officials and they support me. In formal meetings we'll say that PKK and Dharma Wanita are good for us, but deep in our hearts we know they are not. In a meeting of Bupati (heads of districts), kepala desa (heads of villages) and their wives...I asked the governor how the PKK and Dharma Wanita may become more professional rather than relying merely on the wives of government officials...Can you imagine if we never had the time to take care of our children? They will become becak (trishaw) drivers because nobody takes good care of them. The governor said that he agrees with me, but it is the system (LGO1, December 2001).*

Table 1: Percentage of representation in public life based on gender

Institution/Rank	Women (%)	Men (%)
First Echelons ¹⁷	4.5	95.5
Second Echelons	3.9	96.1
Third Echelons	8	92
Journalists	10.9	89.1
Heads of Villages	2.3	97.7
Heads of Districts	1.5	98.5
Governors	0	100
House of Representatives	9	91
People Consultative Assembly (PCA)	9.2	90.8
Supreme Court	14.8	85.2
Supreme Advisory Board	4.4	95.6

Source: BPS 2001, CETRO 2001

During my interviews with other local government officials I found a similar shared rejection of the structure of PKK. Through the PKK and Dharma Wanita, the state has extended its intervention into family life, controlling both men and women. In serving the interests of the regime, women's roles as mothers have to be subsumed under their

¹⁷ Echelon indicates ranks in civil service. The first echelon is the highest rank which refers to General Director of a state department; second echelon is for Director and third echelon is for head of a section.

roles as wives, as their husbands' appendages. Furthermore these organisations do little to support women's productive roles outside of household. The patriarchal structure of PKK has not only subordinated and exploited women but also opened the way for corruption and nepotism in Indonesia.

Reformation Era

Indonesian economic growth, which was praised by the World Bank as one of the Asian economic miracles, began to deteriorate in 1997 and immediately transformed into a political crisis which led to the overthrow of the 32 years of Soeharto authoritarian rule by popular power on May 21, 1998.

This crisis led to the deterioration of the quality of women's life. The gender gap in the nine-year basic education program, which had been almost eliminated in 1997, has widened again since 1998 (JICA, 2000). UNDP (2002) reports that between 1997 and 1998, the number of women earning wages below the poverty line doubled from 11% to 22%, and across Indonesia in 1998, women's real wages were a third lower than men's. Thus, women have to work longer hours and do extra work in order to fulfill basic household needs (UNDP, 2002). The 1997 crisis in Indonesia has contributed to the decline of women's nutritional and reproductive health as shown by the increase of maternal malnutrition from 15% to 17.5%. The UNDP report further showed that 18.4% of women suffered from chronic under-nutrition.

Indonesian women were quick in responding to the impact of the crisis. Initiated by their concern over the soaring prices, and the widespread social unrest and violence in society, a group of middle class women consisting of university lecturers, activists, intellectuals and housewives who called themselves the *Suara Ibu Peduli* (SIP/ Voice of Concerned Mothers), organised a demonstration at the Hotel Indonesia roundabout (*Bundaran HI*) in central Jakarta on February 23, 1998, demanding economic and political reforms. Despite their peaceful demonstration in the form of praying, singing and reading poetry, the government perceived them as both violating public safety and

contradicting government procedures¹⁸, hence they were taken away by the police and brought to court.

SIP was also actively involved in the movement towards Reformation by distributing and providing meals and medical assistance collected from the community to demonstrating students. Although receiving sympathy from the public, the significance of SIP was reduced by the media and community to women merely concerned about domestic issues such as prices of milk, rice, and other domestic necessities. They were regarded as a moral movement rather than a politically motivated movement (Arivia, 1998; Suryakusuma, 1999; Robinson, 2000).

However, this women's movement should be considered as a significant contributor in the Indonesian struggle towards Reformation. SIP broke the long silence and fear of society towards the authoritarian regime by conducting demonstrations in strategic public places such as the Hotel Indonesia roundabout despite the government's week-long ban on demonstrations and other political activities. This was then followed by demonstrations by other groups of professionals, civil servants, and then students. Moreover, through their activities, the SIP also challenged and transformed the established New Order gender ideology which posited women as merely passive agents in the Indonesia's political system as well as recipients and instruments for conducting government policies. Departing from 'domestic' issues such as milk prices, child welfare, security and nutrition, SIP challenged government public policy on education, economics, social welfare and health; all politically and strategically central issues in Indonesia. Thus, as Stephen (cited in Seligmann, 2001:12) succinctly argues, women may challenge ideas of separation of private and public spheres:

Public and private spheres are wholly interconnected and that power is exercised by women whose practical and strategic gender interests necessarily merge... to assume that women would enter the public political arena, driven by concerns

¹⁸ Government requires citizens and organisations who intend to do public activities to inform government of their intention prior to conducting their activities.

that involved private mothering misses the fact that mothering has always been both public and private. While hegemonic interpretations of women's proper behavior may confine mothering to the domestic realm, there is no guarantee that women themselves see mothering as a solely private activity.

Gendered Impacts of Reformation in Indonesia

Since its independence, Indonesia has experienced two drastic regime transitions, in 1965 (from the Old Order to the New Order) and 1998 (from the New Order to Reformation). During both regime transitions women were targets of threats and violence. While in 1965 women in GERWANI (*Gerakan Wanita Indonesia* or Indonesian Communist Party's Women's Auxiliary) were imprisoned due to the accusation that they sexually harassed and killed some military generals in Indonesia (Wieringa 1999), in May 1998, Chinese women in Jakarta were harassed and raped during a time of intense anti Chinese propaganda (13-15 May 1998). These rapes also occurred in Medan, Palembang and Surabaya (Wandita 1998). The subordinate position of women disseminated during the New Order regime contributed to the violence on women. Chinese women were attacked as a representation of hatred towards Chinese in Indonesia. Women were left unprotected and powerless.

The adoption of CEDAW in Law No.7/1984 on the elimination of any form of violence against women, seems to provide no guarantee for the protection of women in Indonesia. The issue of women's victimisation during the May 1998 riot has never become a priority concern of the government or the society, despite criticisms from women activists. Reports on the occurrences of rapes were denied by the government and media through the insensitivity of the media which required names of the victims if the reports about the rapes were to be considered as factual (Wandita, 1998). However, the grotesque acts of violence and rape towards Chinese women in Jakarta have united women and have been protested against by women regardless of their differences (across ethnic and religious lines). It was only after increasing pressure from both women organisations in Indonesia and international influence that the Habibie regime condemned the rapes and by a Presidential Decree, in October 1998, established a

National Commission for the Elimination of Violence against Women which consists of women activists, NGOs, intellectuals and public figures (Wandita, 1998; Suryakusuma, 1999). Along with this, a National Plan of Action permeated by a Zero Tolerance Policy is being developed through close collaboration among relevant government departments, concerned NGOs and social groups. Regarding women's human rights, the Five Year National Human Rights Plan (1998-2003) and the National Human Rights Act adopted in 1999 both included sections on women's rights. Other national action programs such as *Kata Bunga* (abbreviated from *buka mata-buka telinga* or open eyes, open ears) have been included as one of the strategies in protecting women against violence (JICA, 2000).

Despite women's contribution and participation in Reformation, male domination in Indonesia's political system remains intact. Although 58% of voters (1999) are women, they occupy only 9.2% of the seats in the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR), and 9% in the People's Representative Council (DPR). Women's participation in formal politics is reflected in the continuing decrease of women as members of DPR RI from 13% (1987), 12.5% (1992), 10.8% (1997), to 9% (1999) (Sekretariat DPR, 2001; Cetro, 2002). Thus, women's representation is the lowest since the 1987 election. This decline is obvious in Table 2 (see page 150).

The DPR (People's Representative Council) remains segregated as women representatives are mostly involved in VII Commission (on welfare and women empowerment) and VI Commission (religion, education and culture). From the 48 political parties eligible to participate in the 1998 election, only four political parties that succeeded to be eligible to compete in the election had women as their leaders: PDI-P (the leader of PDI-P, Megawati Soekarno Putri, is the present President of Indonesia), MKGR, PNI, PKNI.

In enhancing women's involvement in formal politics the Indonesian Women's Political Caucus and Parliament Women's Caucus have agreed upon and demanded a 20-30% quota for women in parliament. Political parties such as PPP, Golkar, PDIP, PAN, PKB

accept that percentage as rational for achieving representation from women (Shanti, 2001:29).

Table 2: Composition of House of Representatives, 1950 to 2004

Period	Women	Men
1950 – 1955	9 (3.8%)	236 (96.2%)
1955 – 1956	17 (6.3%)	272 (93.7%)
1956 – 1959	25 (5.1%)	488 (94.9%)
1959 – 1971	-	-
1971 – 1977	36 (7.8%)	460 (92.2%)
1977 – 1982	29 (6.3%)	460 (93.7%)
1982 – 1987	39 (8.5%)	460 (91.5%)
1987 – 1992	65 (13%)	500 (87%)
1992 – 1997	62 (12.5%)	500 (87.5%)
1997 – 1999	54 (10.8%)	500 (89.2%)
1999 – 2004	46 (9%)	500 (91%)

Source : CETRO, 2002

Due to the inherited chaotic economic situation, the new Habibie administration which replaced the Soeharto regime failed to gain domestic and international confidence. The worsening economic performance continued until the end of 1998 and resulted in a general election in October 1999. Although in this first free election in Indonesia since 1955 Megawati's PDI-P party gained the majority vote of 35%, she only became the Vice-President with Abdurahman Wahid as the President. Based on religious arguments, the sex of Megawati was used as a political issue to withhold and obstruct her election as President of Indonesia. Majelis Ulama Indonesia (the Council of Indonesian Muslim Scholars) issued a religious edict in which it declared that a woman cannot become a President and called on Muslims not to vote for a non-Muslim headed political party or individuals who would be unlikely to promote a Muslim agenda (JICA, 2000; Heffner, 2000). Although this is in contradiction with the Indonesian constitution of 1945, especially chapter 27, which guarantees equal rights for all

citizens, and the ratification of the UN convention on women's political rights (1956) and CEDAW (1984), this issue has been successfully used in discriminating against a woman becoming the President, thus denying women's rights as equal citizens of Indonesia.

Due to the prolonged severe economic crisis since 1997 and the turbulence in Indonesia's political system, the new duet of President Abdurahman Wahid and Vice-President Megawati failed to fulfill the people's enthusiasm for improving economic, social and political well-being which were the main issues and objectives of Reformation. The government's failure resulted in Megawati becoming the first Indonesian woman President.

Despite experiencing discrimination herself in her bid for the presidency mentioned above, Megawati seems to ignore the persistent challenges and discrimination towards women in Indonesia, as quoted in a newspaper:

I am not an anti gender person, but I feel by problematicising gender it will reduce the spheres, reducing opportunities that we actually have in which we do not need to look that we are women and they are men (Analisadaily 22/04/02).

This statement by Megawati at the Kartini day celebration in Semarang seems to justify doubts about her solidarity and empathy with the women's movement in Indonesia. In the field, I found similar justification for 'not problematicising gender' was frequently used by local government officials to deny the existence of gender discrimination in Indonesia.

The neglect of women in the Reformation is evident in the existence of various laws that discriminate against women, such as employment, marriage, health, education and tax laws which have been left untouched. Up to now only two of all the proposed laws (*Rancangan Undang-Undang/ RUUs*) which have clauses on women have been issued as Laws (*Undang-Undang/ UU*): Law No.25/2000 on gender budgeting and gender perspectives on development and Law No.2/2000 on special protection for women as victims of violence (CETRO, 2002).

One of the prominent impacts of Reformation on women was the promulgation of the GBHN 1999-2004 which provides an encouraging development policy aimed to empower women by emphasising the significance of enhancing the quality and independence of women's organisations. It also recognises the urgent need to implement national policy and establishing relevant institutions which will struggle for gender equity. The GBHN 1999-2004 describes the empowerment of women in development in Indonesia as:

- Enhancing women's position and role in societal and national life through the implementation of national policies by institutions that are capable of struggling to realize gender equity and justice.
- Enhancing the quality of the roles and independence of women organisations by maintaining the value of unity and historical value of women's struggle, in order to continue women's empowerment and family and society welfare.

Interestingly, for the first time the term *kodrat dan martabat wanita* which was frequently manipulated by the New Order to control and subordinate women, has been eliminated in GBHN 1999-2004. Women's roles are extended to include all aspects of development and the betterment of women and gender equity becomes the responsibility of all society and government institutions. However, this policy still positions women's empowerment in relation to family and societal welfare. Despite the changing policies aimed at improving women's condition, development policies in Indonesia have neglected women's collective needs which are a significant element of women's empowerment. These policies cannot respond to the diversity of women's needs and interests as socially distinct groups in society. This is evident in the low rank of Indonesia GDI¹⁹ (Gender Development Index) which occupied the 109 rank from the 174 measured countries which is lower than other ASEAN countries (UNDP, 2000).

¹⁹ GDI measures inequalities between men and women by focusing on longevity, knowledge and a decent standard of living (UNDP 2001:6).

National Mechanisms for Integrating Women in Indonesia's Development

The national mechanism for integrating women in Indonesia's development was influenced by the international women's movement. In line with the first United Nations (UN) Conference on Women in Mexico (1975) which aimed at increasing women's role and participation in development, an organisation headed by a Junior Minister was first established in 1978. In 1983 the status of Junior Minister of Women's Affairs was promoted into a cabinet position as the Office of the Minister of State for the Role of Women (MenUPW/Menteri Urusan Peranan Wanita). As a national government institution, the MenUPW has a mandate to coordinate, monitor, make policy recommendations to government and coordinate development projects for the enhancement of women's role in development implemented by government's sectoral agencies.

In enabling MenUPW to function effectively, institutional arrangements have been made. As a member of the cabinet, the State Minister interacts with other ministries and members of the cabinet. Monthly consultative meetings are held with governmental agencies. The MenUPW also works with other sectoral agencies such as education, health, and agriculture which deal directly with women's issues and aim to increase women's participation in development. In each department a Bureau Planning Unit which is designated as the focal point for women in development activities was established. The UN views the establishment of such state institutions as a sign of 'a government's recognition of the need to incorporate a gender dimension in the total work program of departments and an increase in the priority given to women in development issues' (UN 1995:231).

The MenUPW has significantly contributed to the adoption of CEDAW into Law No.7/1984 and the 1995 Beijing Declaration. It also showed support for men to share women's domestic burdens by including the following statement in the 1993 GBHN: 'affirms that the promotion of women's role in the welfare of the family is to be implemented alongside the promotion of awareness of (the) parent's (male and female)

role and responsibility in the education of children', although this is not followed by the official sanction to its violation. Despite the achievements mentioned above, the MenUPW has had limited political influence (JICA, 2000; Blackburn, 1999). It has not been able to strongly influence the inclusion of gender equality through WID/GAD policy to all sectoral departments. A JICA report (2000) indicates the marginalisation of gender issues in the national development planning process is evident in the limited number of proposals of WID programs coming from each department submitted to the National Development Planning Board (BAPPENAS) as well as lack of awareness of gender mainstreaming within the BAPPENAS. Obstacles facing MenUPW is described by the UN as follows:

It lacks both staff and funds to adequately monitor and evaluate the implementation of programs on women in development. Practical commitment in the form of resources has also been limited. The ministry has no separate budget, because special projects for women are funded through sectoral departments (UN, 1995:228).

In 1999, during the Reformation era, the Ministry for the Role of Women was changed into the State Ministry for Women Empowerment (*Menteri Negara Pemberdayaan Perempuan/MNPP*). The term 'the role of women' had long been criticised by women activists in Indonesia as assuming women have no roles or do not participate in development, thus neglecting the reality of women's contribution to Indonesia's development. The change from 'the role of women' to 'the women's empowerment' also indicates the intention to expand the WID approach to include both GAD and WAD approaches in equalizing gender relations in Indonesia. The targets for the development of women's role include: expanding women's access to development resources through education, eliminating any forms of violence and discrimination against women through the Zero Tolerance Policy while at the same time fulfilling women's rights, including reproductive rights; improving the role of the formal and non-formal social institutions; and improving the public service institutions that support women's efforts in development toward the creation of the civil society. Thus, in realising gender equity the state embraces three approaches - increasing the capability of women in development (WID); integrating and bringing the women into the mainstream of national development (GAD); encouraging women towards partaking a multiple roles

in development (WAD) (MNPP-RI 2000). During Abdurahman Wahid's administration, the MNPP proposed that 30% of positions in the top two echelons of bureaucracy and legislatures should be occupied by women, as well as proposing the amendment of Law No1/1974 which posits men as the head of households (Parawansa 2002).

Gender Mainstreaming in Indonesia

In line with the GBHN 1999 and Law No. 25/2000 on the National Development Program (Propenas 2000-2004), gender mainstreaming is one strategy adopted to realise gender equity in Indonesia. The development vision of the Propenas specifically focuses on developing people's welfare and cultural resilience, and empowering women through gender mainstreaming in all aspects of development which involve government institutions and community organisations.

Based on Inpres (Presidential Instruction) No.9/2000 on gender mainstreaming has been enacted, meaning, 11 focal points for women's empowerment have been established in 10 ministries, along with one coordinating ministry (Parawansa 2002:75). As part of gender mainstreaming in Indonesia, Women's Empowerment Bureaus have been formed in 30 provinces, along with 89 Women Studies Centre (*Pusat Studi Wanita*), National Commission on Women (*Komisi Nasional Perempuan*) and a National Commission on Children (*Komisi Nasional Anak*). With MNPP (*Menteri Negara Pemberdayaan Perempuan* or the State's Ministry for Women's Empwerment) as the coordinator, government institutions at all levels are instructed to conduct gender mainstreaming in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development policies and programs (Inpres No.9/2000). In its strategic planning the MNPP's objectives for women's empowerment programs include the improvement of government policy, programs and activities to make them gender responsive. By 2004, MNPP hopes to have integrated gender responsiveness into 50% of all policies, programs and regulating laws. The MNPP also aims to establish gender mainstreaming units in all provinces and in at least 50% in districts and cities (MNPP-RI 2000).

However, the achievement of gender mainstreaming in Indonesia through the MNPP has faced several problems. The intertwined complexity of institutional and financial constraints will continue as impediments to the achievement of the MNPP's aims. The seriousness of the central and local government to conduct gender mainstreaming is to be questioned considering the limited budget provided for gender mainstreaming programs. In 2001 national development budget (APBN), there was special budget for institutionalizing gender mainstreaming, but this was only available to four departments: the Department of Health, Employment, Education, Religion and MNPP. This consists of only 1.15% of the total 2001 national budget (APBN 2001). Up to 2000 there was no budget specifically aimed at enhancing gender equity in all regional budgets (APBD), except for Nusa Tenggara Timur (East Nusa Tenggara).

The implementation of Law 22/1999 on regional autonomy in Indonesia creates more challenges for the MNPP in mainstreaming gender especially at the local level. MNPP (2000) in its strategic planning listed the transition to regional autonomy as one of the threats to gender mainstreaming in Indonesia, along with interpretation of religious and cultural values that are still gender biased, the existence of many of regulating laws which are gender biased and neglect children, lack of awareness among government officials, and weak mechanisms in controlling and monitoring the implementation of gender mainstreaming. At the local level many harsh criticisms have been directed by both women activists and local government officials at the MNPP's performance. Although with different interpretations, both local government officials and women activists/NGOs feel MNPP has been ineffective in fulfilling its mandate. In informal conversation with women activists, NGOs and CBOs on the management capacity of MNPP, MNPP was perceived as being out of their reach. The relationship of MNPP with women at the local level, in this case NGOs and the PSW/Women Studies Centre, was mainly limited to providing funds for these women to do research and to attend seminars to these women. Information and publications from the MNPP did not reach the women at the local level. By and large, these groups of women perceived that the benefits of the MNPP are yet to be felt by local women. Considering the lack of gender awareness of local government officials, many women felt MNPP should increase its

direct involvement and influence on local government. In pointing out the powerlessness of MNPP in dealing with local government as the source of ineffectiveness of MNPP in empowering women at the local level, a woman argues:

MNPP has no influence over the local government. Like a cat with no claws...useless. MNPP is a state ministry, not technical..the local government ignores MNPP...So MNPP should have its teeth (power) over local government in order to be able to empower women...Should MNPP intend to reach women at the grassroots then it needs to coordinate with women's empowerment bureau. MNPP should avoid intermediaries but directly engage through direct coordination (WSC2, November 2001).²⁰

Others felt the problem of the MNPP lay more with its weakness in strategies and capabilities than in its lack of authority. MNPP's direct activities at the local level were perceived as a sign of mistrust of local government and community. A local government official contends:

There is no reason for MNPP to argue that it does not have authority since it has no department. MNPP is also the President's assistant. If MNPP can delegate responsibilities and duties to the regional planning board (BAPPEDA), why can't they do the same to national planning board (BAPPENAS)? What about those high MNPP officials come directly to the regions to conduct training and seminars? How much funding has been used to fund them? Do not the local government and PSW (Women Studies Centre) have the capacity? Have they ever evaluated the performance of government agencies in gender mainstreaming? Well, it is very important but they never did it. ...We have repeatedly sent project proposals for women's empowerment to the national government and PSW, but they do not respond. I have been disappointed with the women empowerment programs (LGO7, December 2001).

Recent decentralisation in Indonesia brings about changes in national and local government relations and within local government structures. What changes do decentralisation bring to the relationship between women and local government? Does decentralisation have a gender differential impact? Will decentralisation bring local government closer to women? The following sections will discuss the impact of

²⁰ I use WSC as a code referring to research participants from Women's Studies Centre
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decentralisation with particular attention to the empowerment of women at the local level.

Decentralisation

Decentralisation is not new to Indonesia. Of the nine laws on local government and decentralisation, two were produced during Dutch colonialism, six were produced by the post independence regimes and the recent Law No.22/1999 was issued by the Reformation regime. Despite differences in the principle of decentralisation, these laws, to some extent, were gendered as will be explained below.

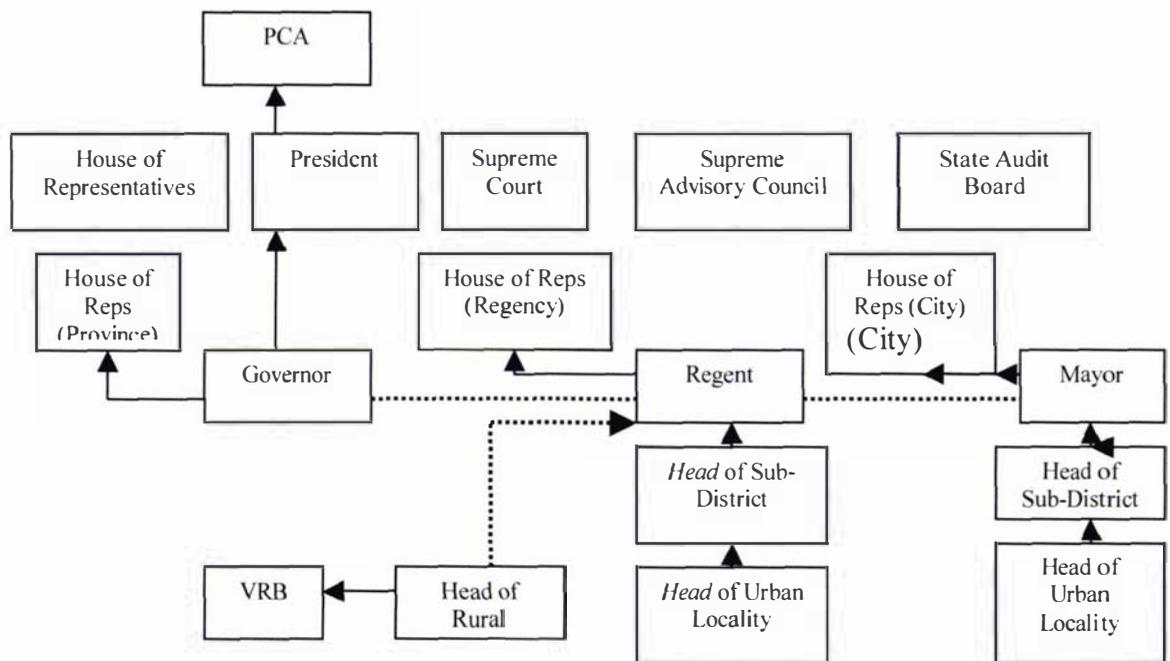
Policies on local government and decentralisation during the post independence period remain gendered and enforced the marginality of women in decision making at local level. Up to 1962 colonial policy which prohibited women from becoming heads of villages was preserved by the post independence regime in Indonesia. For example three women who were actually elected by the people as head of villages in Central Java could not occupy the position because of this law (Soewondo, 1984). By destroying the traditional local government structure of *nagari* and transforming it into hierarchical bureaucracy of local government, the New Order regime curbed women's traditional *adat* rights, thus leading to marginalisation of women's political, economic and legal position (Wieringa, 1995). The New Order land policy which required households to register their land under the name of the head of household, which based on Indonesia's marriage law is the man, deprives women of their communal land rights since it did not provide women with access and legal ways to repossess their land if, for example, a male registers clan land under his name and sells it (which was illegal under *adat* regulations) (Wieringa, 1995:257). Studies of local government in Java reveals the cooptation of women's participation at the local level whereby women are merely being used to support and implement the role of local government (Sullivan, 1992; Sullivan, 1994). PKK, which has been discussed above, is one of the vehicles of local government to mobilise women as resources for development.

One of the prominent results of Reformation in Indonesia is the issuance of Law No.22/1999 on Local Government which aims at devolving more power to local government over regional development (popular participation). This law constitutionally changed the relationship and position between central and local governments limiting central government power to the areas of the judiciary, security and defence, foreign policy, religious affairs and other activities specified by government regulations, while the regions have the authority over all other government activities. Based on this law Indonesia is comprised of autonomous provinces, municipalities (*kota*) for urban areas, districts (*kabupaten*) and villages for rural areas. The emphasis of the devolution of power is on districts and municipalities which means that head of districts and municipalities directly accountable to the local assembly (DPRD) rather than the Governor (head of province) as before the implementation of this law. Districts/municipalities have consultative rather than vertical/hierarchical relationship with the provinces. Provinces have dual status as autonomous regions with power to manage cross inter-districts/municipalities and other authorities that are yet to be implemented by districts/municipalities. Provinces are also the representatives of central government with administration tasks delegated by the central. Figure 4 (page 149) reveals national and local government structure based on Law No.22/1999.

Law No.22/1999 is based on principles of democracy, participation, equity, and justice which recognises regional diversity. Thus, this new law is intended to increase the capacity of civil society and foster community participation by strengthening the position of the people's representation in monitoring and asking for accountability of the executive. The emphasis of the devolution of power is on regencies and cities which means that head of regencies and cities are directly accountable to the House of Representatives at their level rather than to the Governor (head of province). With the increasing power of the local government, which has to be accountable to people's representatives, the aim is that local governance in Indonesia will be more participatory and will enable local government to act in accordance with the needs and aspirations of communities.

After decentralisation, local politics became more crucial in understanding politics in Indonesia. Since 2001, 30 provinces, 360 districts and 66,000 VRB (Village Representative Body/ VRB) have emerged as the result of the implementation of this law. This law reveals appreciation of the many local cultures and characteristics of diverse regions in Indonesia. It is hoped that by allowing people to be involved more in governance, decentralisation will increase the trust of local communities toward government.

Figure 4: The Structure of Government in Indonesia after Law No.22/1999



Source: Siahaan, based on Law No.22/1999

Notes:

- Continuous lines signify vertical/hierarchical relationship.
- Jagged lines signify consultative relationship
- PCA (People's Consultative Assembly)
- House of Reprs (House of Representatives)
- VRB (Village Representative Body)

Despite its intention to devolve power to the House of Representatives and heads of localities at each levels of regional and local government, this law does not elaborate on

devolving power to the community. It lacks clear accountability mechanisms for the people to control regional and local House of Representatives and it lacks clear implementing and supporting regulations which creates confusion in implementation. There is no specific provision for people's participation and no clear accountability mechanism for members of the parliament. Based on a conference about local government and decentralisation in Indonesia conducted at Australia National University in 2002, many critiques were forwarded concerning decentralisation in Indonesia such as: the up-surge of regional/ethnic sentiments, corruption, excessive increase in taxation which is not followed by improvement in service delivery, primordialism and structural and financial problems.

Thus, the stress on strengthening local government and people's representation which is stipulated in the new law may be inadequate in strengthening and increasing community participation, let alone in being sensitive to women's needs and interests and empowering for women. It focuses heavily on devolving power to local authorities and representatives, yet does not mention the devolution of power to the community. This is an important issue if local government is to be accountable to the community.

Moreover Law No.22/1999 still lacks a gender perspective since none of its chapters recognises the importance of a gender perspective in local governance. The previous law on local government was heavily focused on economic growth as the measurement of achievement in implementing local government programs. This emphasis on growth along with gender insensitivity of local government and its mechanisms has marginalised women and led to the invisibility of women in local governance in Indonesia. Without elaboration in law and programs for women's empowerment at the local level, the devolution of power to local government women will continuously exclude women from determining local development agendas.

Gender Dimensions of Decentralisation in Indonesia

It is interesting to examine that while women's representation at the national level, as presented in Table 2, is continuously declining, at the local level it is increasing although it remains marginal. While no women have yet been elected as governor, women elected as Bupati increased from two (1996), to five (1999) to seven (2001). The percentage of women elected as heads of villages also increased from 2.0% (1996) to 2.3% (1999) to 3.4% (2001). Women have greater chances to be elected as head of villages in urban areas (*lurah*) where they are appointed by government (4.2%) compared to that of 2.1% in rural areas where people directly elect the *kepala desa* (Surbakti, 2002:211). The emergence of Village Representative Bodies (VRB) provides maneuvering room for women to run for the election and to be elected as representatives at these assemblies. Up to now there is no comprehensive data on women as members of VRB in various regions in Indonesia. Data from Nganjuk shows that 5.8% of its VRB members are women (CETRO, 2001), while for Deli Serdang the figure is 8.3% (personal communication Federasi HAPSARI, January 2002). However, women as representatives at DPRD I (House of Representatives at the provincial level) have continuously declined from 7% (1996) to less 5.4% (1999) and to less than 2% (2001). An appraisal of decentralisation in Indonesia found that women's participation in public decision making is still low and limited (Abidin, 2002).

Institutionally, decentralisation brought about positive effects on women in which 30 provinces in Indonesia now have focal points for women's empowerment. However, not all regencies and cities have women's empowerment bureaus. These focal points face huge problems such as reluctance and/or rejection from the regional house of representative and local government to the establishment of women's empowerment bureaus, limited authority and funds, and competition with other sections in local government offices (LGO2; LGO3; LGO4; LGO5, December 2002). The most frequent argument in rejecting the establishment of women's empowerment bureaus is that districts and municipalities do not have adequate budgets to fund these bureaus. Considering the number of facilities for members of House of Representatives at the provincial and local level, and heads of local government in the regional budget,

women's activists on the other hand argue that the real obstruction to the establishment of focal points derives from the lack of local government's political will to promote gender equity programs rather than the limited budget (NGO1; NGO2; NGO4, November 2001).

Radical democracy conceptualised local civil society as 'a relatively autonomous site of material and symbolic resistance and empowerment' (Mohan and Stokke, 2000:259). However, the threat from the local culture towards women cannot be ignored in discussing the achievements of decentralisation. The local communities are not always democratic and they may reject or subvert changes brought about by international bodies and national governments, especially when these changes threaten their interests which have been maintained by traditional norms and structures. Local structures are more difficult to change than are higher levels of political organisations (Hadenius and Ugla, 1996; Philips, 1996; Blair 2000). Should the changes threaten traditional norms and structures that have served their interests for a long time, local communities will frequently resist or subvert changes brought about by national governments and international bodies. At this point, the locality of local government may obstruct the attempt in reversing patterns of women's subordination at the local level. Along with the increasing competition over power and resources, the devolution of power to local authorities may marginalised women through the domination of the stronger groups over local power and resources (Byrne and Laier, 1996).

Law No.22/1999 which allows for the revitalisation of local values and tradition has been followed by the tendency of the strengthening of local patriarchal values. Many of the proposed Ranperda (regional regulations) are aimed at monitoring and restricting women's movement. For example, UU (Law) Nanggroe Aceh Darusalam which was legitimated on 20/7/2000 obligates women to wear *jilbab* (Moslem women's dress). Women activists in Aceh criticised this law by arguing that it increases women's burden in the way that women have to spend much times thinking of what to wear prior to their going out of the house because they are afraid of the punishment they might received

(Kompas 3/9/2000). This fear is not without reason since there have been some cases of violence towards women who do not obey this law.

Although based on Law 22/1999 Aceh is the only region in Indonesia that can implement the *Syariah* (Islamic law), recently other regions such as: South Sulawesi, Banten, Tasik Malaya, Pamekasan, Riau, Ternate and Gorontalo are discussing the possibility to issue Perda on *Syariah* which have been proposed to the Regional House of Representatives (Herlina, 2002). These local governments avoid mentioning the word *Syariah* in obligating women to wear *jilbab* but based this obligation on morality and local tradition arguments. Pressure from certain groups in the society, has discouraged women to go out without wearing the *jilbab*. In Tasikmalaya, a woman had her hair shaved by the community because she went out unaccompanied by her husband. In Yogya, youth from certain Islamic political parties questioned and threatened women who go out at night. Public hearing and citizens forums are used to urge the implementation of the *Syariah*.

In many of the proposed regional regulations women are seen as the source of the problems to the community and regional development so that local government need to regulate women's activities and determine which sphere women may engage in. For example: the proposed regional regulations of Kabupaten Karimun (Riau Province) on violation against immoral acts, regulates women as sexual worker, while not considering the possibility that some women are forced to work as prostitutes. Interestingly, the revival of traditional values in regions that apply matrilineal system does not guarantee that women's needs and interest will be protected. For example, the proposed regional regulation of West Sumatra No.9/2000 chapter 10 (3) states : 'Women are prohibited to be outside their homes from 22.00 P.M until 04.00 A.M except if they are with their husbands and/or doing activities that are protected by law' (Kompas, 2001). Critics from women's organisations have successfully abolished this Ranperda. However, based on Perda (local government of Jakarta) No.5/2000, the election of VRB (village community representatives) should be attended by at least two-third of the head of households who, based on Marriage Law 1/1974, are men. These

proposed regional regulations are gender insensitive and discriminate against women since they do not consider that some women have to work at night to support their families. While these regional regulations prohibit women from working at night, they do not describe how to compensate the loss of women's income which is vital for their family's survival.

Women are vulnerable to threats from both the society and local government. Despite diversity among regions in North Sumatra, there is a striking similarity of patterns to impede women's participation in public decision making such as: women are not invited to VRB (Village Consultative Body) elections, sometimes women are invited to elect but not to be elected in VRB; women do not have access to information on decentralisation; women who are actively involved in local affairs are threatened by accusations of being members of GERWANI (*Gerakan Wanita Indonesia* or Indonesian Communist Party's Women's Auxiliary), as *perempuan kurang kerjaan* (women who have no work), *perempuan usil* (women who meddle in other people's affairs), *perempuan nakal* (bad/ immoral women); threatening these women that they will be caught and put to prison. This situation, which will be elaborated further in Chapter Seven and Eight, reveals the legacy of gender ideology produced by the New Order regime which continues to exist amidst Reformation and decentralisation in Indonesia.

Conclusion

The role of the state in defining women's identity and interests is central in explaining the persistent differentiation between women's and men's roles in pursuing economic growth and political interests in Indonesia. The New Order regime skillfully controlled and mobilised women by redefining women's primary role in reproductive activities and men's role in productive activities. As Sullivan (1994:133) rightly argues: 'This ideal woman was the modern development oriented Indonesian housewife primarily defined in terms of her commitment to follow her husband's lead and limit her reproduction capacity to the ideal older son-younger daughter'. With this gendered responsibility, women have been disadvantaged as second class citizens of Indonesia.

Through their public activities in demanding and responding to Reformation, however, some women in Indonesia have challenged the New Order gender ideology. Reformation has provided opportunities for the emergence of various women's organisations which have raised women's interests and related gender issues in public forums. The election of Megawati, as the first female President in Indonesia, shows that in the case of national crisis the dire need to protect national unity and interests can take precedence over cultural and religious sanctions of gendered ideology that prohibit a woman from becoming the national leader. This opens up other possible areas for equalizing gender relationship in Indonesia.

However, Reformation has not guaranteed gender equity. As has been described above, the percentage of female representatives in the national and local level House of Representatives is continuously declining. Lessons from the New Order era reveals that programs that focus merely on fulfilling women's practical interests while being repressive towards women's strategic interests, as in the case of PKK and KB (family planning) programs, have been detrimental to women's empowerment by failing to address the unequal gender relations which are at the root of women's subordination.

To adjust to the implementation of Law 22/1999 on decentralisation in Indonesia, the national mechanism for gender mainstreaming such as the MNPP needs to reformulate its role by emphasizing gender advocacy more, lobbying at the national level, and strengthening networking between gender empowerment agencies at regional and local levels. MNPP needs to establish closer relations with women's empowerment bureaus and civil society actors at the local level in analyzing laws and local government regulations and proposing amendments to gender biased laws and regulations.

Many national documents and mechanisms on gender mainstreaming have been issued and established. The problems in implementing actual change rest on lack of awareness and the lack of political will of government officials to implement these strategies and policies. It is the urgent task of diverse stakeholders in Indonesia, especially women's

organisations and civil society organisations, to work together creatively and proactively pushing for serious implementation of national gender equity programs in all aspects of development. Monitoring and evaluating the performance of government agencies in implementing gender policy, as well as enforcing sanctions regarding violations of policy will be crucial in ensuring that Reformation in Indonesia will also transform unequal gender relations and achieve gender equity. Women and men should be equal participants and recipients of development rather than being used merely as servants of development.

CHAPTER SIX

***PERWIRIDAN* (MOSLEM WOMEN'S RELIGIOUS GROUPING): AN ALTERNATIVE SPACE FOR EMPOWERMENT**

INTRODUCTION

In almost every neighborhood in Indonesia there are women's religious groupings. Despite the fact that most women in Indonesia participate in religious groupings, these groupings have received little attention in the study of women in Indonesia. This chapter focuses on *perwiridan*, which is a religious grouping in which Moslem women gather to read the Quran together, in *kelurahan*²¹ Melayu. This activity takes place alternately at houses of members of the *perwiridan* with gatherings held once a week. This chapter argues that in the midst of limited public space available to women, the *perwiridan* provides a strategic space for women to participate in local governance in their own way. It highlights the centrality of household gender relations in explaining the extent of women's participation in local governance.

This chapter begins with a brief description of the research site, *kelurahan* Melayu. Then it discusses the impact of religion and *adat* (custom) on women's roles and position in the Malay community which is one ethnic group in Indonesia. Following this description, all information derives from my interviews and FGDs (Focus Group Discussions) with *perwiridan* women. This focuses on women's perceptions on household relations and how gendered household relationships influence women's

²¹ *Kelurahan* is a village/ administrative urban region that includes several hamlets

participation in community activities or in local governance. Despite the perception that women have been passive and do not have an interest in or knowledge of local governance, this chapter highlights the fact that women involved in *perwiridan* participate actively in community development and they have the capability to analyse problems related to local governance.

The Setting: *Kelurahan Melayu*

Kelurahan Melayu is a pseudonym for a *kelurahan* in Medan. It is situated close to the sea. Most members of the community in this area are Melayu/Malays who were the first settlers in this region. The Melayu community is said to have originated from the Malayo-Polynesian-speaking peoples of southeastern China who possibly under pressure from Chinese, travelled to Philippines, Borneo and then into Sumatra (Peacock, 1973; Pemdasa, 1996). The Melayu usually live in the coastal regions, very seldom do they live in the jungle. Up to the Dutch colonial period the Malay Sultan ruled over Sumatra (Pemko, Medan 2001). Melayu in Northern Sumatra belong to the same group as the Malays in Malaysia (Kennedy, 1943:13).

Most community members in this area earn their living from catching fish. They earn about Rp.50,000 per day, which is equal to about US\$5. In a month they can only work for 20 days since during high tide and storms they cannot go fishing. Thus, they earn about Rp.1,000,000/month. This income is above the minimum regional wage of North Sumatra which is Rp.464,000 a month (BPS, 2001). However, *kelurahan Melayu* is categorized as *desa tertinggal* (a poor *kelurahan*) based on the community's low education and income.

The Malay neighbourhood studied is easily recognized and differentiated from other neighbourhoods nearby by its poorer housing and living conditions. Most houses are made from *tepas* (dried coconut leaves) but almost all have TV and/or other electronic entertainment devices (Field notes, 16/10/01). According to *kelurahan* officials, some of the Malay community sold their houses and moved to a dangerous area close to the

dam²² and used the money to purchase TVs, VCRs, radios, and other entertainment devices. This situation is frequently pointed out by *kelurahan* officials as evidence of the inability of the community to effectively manage household finances (LGO12; LGO14, October 2001).²³ Some relate the widespread poverty among the Malays to the Malay culture. They point at a Malay saying ‘*Biar rumah rubuh asal bergulai lemak*’ (The poor condition of housing is not a problem as long as there is always delicious food provided). However, by and large, members of the Malay community point at the uncertainty of their income as fishermen, soaring prices and lack of modern fishing equipment as major contributors to their poverty (RG1, October 2001; NGO6, November 2001).

Although the Malay community is not patriarchal, a gendered division of labor is widespread within this community. With few exceptions, most women in this area are fulltime housewives. Some women work as petty traders at home and a few work as teachers. Although there are some fisherwomen, they are different from fishermen since their mobility is limited. They do not go far out to sea, rather they gather mussels at the seashore or fish from a small canoe. And if they want to sell their catch and/or to buy something from another area, four or five fisherwomen will hire a boat which is driven by a man (RG1, October 2001).

Religious groupings play an important role in the life of the Malay community since Malay *adat* has its root in Islam. In *kelurahan* Melayu there are *pengajian*²⁴ (learning the Quran and Islamic teachings) groups which are conducted separately for men and women and *perwiridan* (reading the Quran) which is aimed especially at women. Once

²² Based on government’s regulation, area surrounding the dam should not be occupied.

²³ In this chapter I use codes to refer to research participant: LGO (local government official), NGO (non governmental organisation), RG1 (religious grouping in *kelurahan* Melayu)

²⁴ In Java *pengajian* and *perwiridan* have the same meaning, that is the learning of the Quran and Islamic teachings. *Pengajian* rather than *perwiridan* is more commonly used by the people in Java. In North Sumatra these two terms have different meaning. *Perwiridan* refers to women reading the Quran together and *pengajian* refers to women learn to pursue deeper knowledge on how to read Quran and the Islamic teachings.

a month, *pengajian akbar* in which these groupings meet to read the Quran together, is conducted in *balai desa* (the community hall). This activity is also attended by the *kelurahan* officials. Mostly men attend this event, in practice. Lack of time, lack of information, and the far distance to travel are some of the factors that obstruct women from attending this event (RG1, October 2001; LGO14; LGO15, December 2001).

Malay Women in Religion and *Adat*

Islamic teaching has great influence in the Malay culture since it provides the foundation for the Malay *adat* (customary law). Through interactions with Moslem traders from India, Persia, and Arabia who have come to Sumatra since the middle of the thirteenth century, Islamic teaching has come to form the base and pillars of Malay culture (Marsden, 1966; Loeb, 1973). Islam is considered inseparable from Malay culture and it forms part of the identity of being a Melayu (de-Steurs, 1960; Peacock, 1973; Marsden, 1996). Being a Melayu is equated with being a Moslem, thus, *masuk Melayu* means to become Malay and *masuk Islam*, to embrace Islam as one's faith (Peacock, 1973:150). If a Melayu converts to another religion, s/he will not be considered as a Melayu any longer (RG1, October 2001; LGO 13; LGO14, December 2001). The inextricability of Islam and *adat* in the life of the Malays is obvious in the Malay saying '*Adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi kitabullah*' which means that the foundation of *adat* is *shari'a* (Islamic principles) and the foundation of *shari'a* is the Quran. This implies that *adat* and Islam sit side by side harmoniously, '...like the woof and the weft of one and the same piece of material whose contrasting colors are harmoniously blended' (De Steurs, 1960:22).

Malay *adat*, which is based on bilateral kinship, has been seen by some to confer a degree of equality between women and men (Marsden, 1996; Stivens et al., 1994). Differing from patriarchal communities in other parts of Indonesia, Malay newlywed couples may choose where they want to reside. Based on old Malay *adat*, upon marriage, the couple initially resided matrilocally. Thus, a man shall not directly after marriage take his wife with him out from her parent's house, even if he has got a job

(Kennedy, 1943:45). Children belong to both families, to the husband's as well as to the wife's, and both sons and daughters may inherit the family possessions and the household goods (de-Steurs, 1960:30).

Adat seems to take precedence over the *syariah* in governing household relations and community life in *kelurahan* Melayu. *Adat* and Islam have not always been implemented as harmoniously as they should in the life of the Malay. According to women in *kelurahan* Melayu, *adat* has been implemented in deviation to Islamic teaching and this poses a threat for equal gender relationships in Malay households. Malay women described the incongruence between *adat* and the Islam religion as follows:

(Participant)²⁵: *In adat if we ask our husband to help with washing and ironing then we are said to be fooling our husband*

(Participant): *If a husband does household activities, it is perceived that the woman in that house has no value...she is meaningless.*

(Participant): *In adat if a husband helps his wife in household activities, it is perceived that the wife fools her husband because in adat men's place is higher than women's. If we ask our husband to do something, we are perceived as 'kualat' (doomed). In Islam [however], one's husband has an obligation to help his wife and women and men have to cooperate (RG1, October 2001).*

While establishing a strict logical distinction between *adat* and Islam is said to be highly artificial due to the inextricability of the two in the social life of the Malays (Steurs 1960:22), women in *perwiridan* in *kelurahan* Melayu obviously differentiate the way *adat* and Islam govern Malay household relations. According to these women while Islamic teaching suggests equality among men and women, Malay *adat*, on the other hand, posits women as lower than men by asking women to be fully obedient to their husband (RG1, October 2001). For example, despite the cooperative relationship between husband and wife suggested in Islam, there is a widespread perception among the community that it is sinful for a woman to share housework with her husband.

²⁵ Participant does not necessarily refer to the same person.

Further, Islamic teachings have been interpreted and implemented in *adat* to justify male domination. Women in *kelurahan* Melayu pointed out that *adat* rather than religion is the major factor behind the gendered division of work which contributed to gender inequality in the household. As one woman argued:

In Islam, it is said that a woman is made from her husband's rib, so women will always come the second, but actually the Quran is interpreted and translated partially, those interpretations that will benefit men are socialised into society...There is a hadist saying that women are like clothes to men. If the clothes get dirty they can be thrown away. If the clothes are still good, then men will wear them. That's a partial interpretation. If it is interpreted comprehensively, that's not what it means. If you consider the clothes as expensive, made from silk, we cannot wash them by hand...we should go to laundry...expensive. If we put women that way, it should be... great. If we interpret the Quran comprehensively, then, there are no differences between women and men (RG1, October 2001).

Thus, contrary to Islamic teachings which value and respect women, it is men's misinterpretation of the Quran that has denigrated women.

The Normality of Gendered Housework

Household activities in *kelurahan* Melayu are gendered with child care, education, health, food provision and laundry considered as *kerja perempuan* (women's work). Male activities are wage earning, being the head of household, interacting with community and government institutions. As the consequence of this strict gendered division of labor, in most cases women have difficulty in sharing housework with their husband. *'Men consider women's roles are only at home, so he would not help in carrying out household activities, just earning money'* (RG1, October 2001).²⁶

In analysing relationships at the household level it is important to let individual members of the households explain and analyse gender relations in their household since this provides deeper insights into gender relations as it is based on household

²⁶ I use italics for all quote that come from my fieldwork.

members' perceptions, aspirations and experiences. The transcript below which is based on a FGD with members of the *perwiridan* in *kelurahan* Melayu illustrates gendered household relations and how women perceive and interpret these relationships:

(Participant): *The function of women and men is the same. Just say that fathers work daily, there are also women who work, as a teacher for example, etc...the children are left at home. Children, then, are the responsibility of both mother and father. A mother, of course, has more intimate relations with the children.*

(Participants): *Agree...* [in acclamation].

(Researcher): *Will husbands help with housework activities?*

(Participants together): *They are tired...*

(Participant): *Some husbands do help, but others don't.*

(Researcher): *So?*

(Participants together): *So...they have to take a rest.*

(Researcher): *Do you mean women don't feel tired?*

(Participants): *Well, those who want to help their wife will help their wife, but most husbands do not want to...* [laughter].

(Researcher): *Why don't these husbands help their wives?*

(Participants): *They are tired. At 2 in the afternoon, they have gone fishing and back home in the morning...children help us.*

(Researcher): *In your opinion, do husbands really not need to help their wives?*

(Participants): *Yes... We really need them to help us...it is very important* [acclamation].

(Researcher): *Why?*

(Participant): *They [husbands] are not able to pay for a servant.*

(Participant): *...as for me my husband goes to the office, but he also helps with the housework. Some husbands are responsible and progressive, they understand the law, since in the *Quran*, women are asked to just beautify ourselves for our husbands.*

(Participants): *If our life has been difficult, it is impossible to beautify ourselves* [laughter] (RG1, October 2001).

This discussion among a group of *perwiridan* women in *kelurahan Melayu* suggests the ambiguity of women's attitudes towards gendered household relations. In general it seems that women, especially full time housewives, accept housework activities as women's responsibility, thus confirming their acceptance of the patriarchal ideology of the home. For example, prior to going out to the *perwiridan*, women must cook, wash and clean and do other related housework since they consider these tasks as their obligation. Also during the FGDs some of the women asked permission to go home early to prepare things that their husbands needed before going out to the sea. Some other women went home earlier because their children whom they brought along began to cry. Dependence on men to make decisions can be seen when I asked the group's permission to have their photo taken. They seemed confused and frightened, and they told me that they had to ask their husband's permission first. When I asked why they should have their husbands' permission, they answered that they were afraid that it would have some negative impacts on their family or that they would be caught by the police. They wanted to ask their husbands first because they felt husbands know better about 'politics'. It was after the head of the *perwiridan* explained the academic purpose of my research and noted that the purpose of the photos was to show how discussion was conducted, that they then allowed me to take the photos.

Childcare is undeniably seen as women's responsibility. In every activity, whether in the market, at *pesta adat* (customary feasts) or women's meetings, I found women always brought their children with them. Some women brought their young children to the FGDs and fed them while having discussions with other women. The woman who led one discussion and held the pen to draw the Venn diagram, had to go home because someone called her and told her that her child had woken up. One of the women even took her son who was ill to the *perwiridan*. When I asked why she took her son with her she replied '*Nobody is at home to take care of my children. My husband is sleeping. I don't want him to be disturbed*' (RG1, October 2001). According to these women, the fact that their husbands are fishermen, working from the afternoon and returning home in the morning, makes it impossible for women to distribute housework to men. When I visited some of the key persons in the *perwiridan* in their house, I found them all busy

doing housework. Their husbands were either sitting and/or chatting with their friends on the veranda, sleeping or preparing the fishing equipment (Field notes, 16/10/01).

While other needs and activities related to children's education, such as preparing clothing, doing homework and meeting with teachers are women's responsibility, men's role is limited to providing children's school fees. As a woman describes *'We have many children. But my husband does not know our children's school, let alone their teachers. He said that it is my duty to take care of our children'* (RG1, October 2001).

By and large women accept housework as their responsibility because they perceive that men have provided them with money from their earnings and that men have spent all their energy working as breadwinners. This leads women to accept their responsibilities in household activities as 'normal' and 'natural' (RG1, October 2001). For these women, a house is a place where men may take a rest after spending time and energy to earn money for the family. A threat to a husband's income is considered as a threat to the survival of the whole family.

Thus, the gendered division of labor within the household appears to be upheld by women as well as men. Women tend to see men who help with housework as exceptional cases. For example, during the FGD women burst into laughter when one of the participants who is a petty trader and the wife of civil servant, differed to a certain degree with others in arguing that her husband willingly helped with the housework. According to them, in general husbands do not want to help.

On the other hand, further probing arguably reveals women's rejection of the gendered division of housework. Although most women said that they made decisions regarding household expenses such as children's education and daily meals, they complained that the money their husbands provided was far from sufficient requiring them to struggle to make the most of the money for household survival. According to these women the failure of men to fulfill this religious obligation has contributed to women's inability to carry out their household obligations and has increased women's workload. Basing their

argument on the Islamic principle of marriage, which states that husbands are bound to adequately support their wife and children, these women argued that due to husbands' inability in fulfilling their expected religious obligation to their wives, they should help their wives with housework. Rejection of the gendered division of housework is also obvious from some women's appreciation of men who help with housework: they are considered 'responsible and progressive men who really understand law and religion' (RG1, October 2001). Thus, there is the difference between women's perception of 'ideal household relations' and its reality. This theme of 'hidden rejection' towards patriarchal gender roles at home in the form of their attempt to interpret religion to counter women's subordinate position was obvious across diverse groups of participants. In other words, women used their interpretation of the Quran in their attempt to reformulate and challenge patriarchal ideology.

The community, however, strengthened and preserved gendered roles and norms about housework through popular sayings which helped to continuously determine roles that men and women should perform. Terms such as *menokohi suami* (fooling husband), and *kualat* (doomed), were applied to women whose husbands share the housework, and *dibawah ketiak istri* (under wife's armpit) was used to describe the powerlessness of a man who helped his wife with the housework and allowed his wife to make decisions (RG1, October 2001). Thus, changing these roles is a huge challenge for both men and women since it will lead to criticism from the community.

The state through its gender ideology contributes in strengthening and institutionalizing the gendered household relations as well. Despite the stated equality between men and women in Indonesian policies, the Indonesian government officially recognises the male as head of household. The gendered division of housework is in line with the Indonesian Marriage Law 1974 article 34 paragraphs 1 and 2, which states that the main responsibility of women is in taking care of domestic household affairs while men are responsible for providing adequate family necessities. Article 105 paragraph 1 states that the husband is the head of household while in article 106 it states that a wife should serve and obey her husband. This law reflects the traditional ideal model of the Javanese

feudal-aristocratic family which emphasises women's primary role in reproduction and domestic activities. In this model women are considered as *anggun* (elegant), *halus* (refined), and seen as lacking in critical thinking skills and spiritual strength so that they need to be protected by men (Kusujarti, 1997:90-91). As a consequence, women have to obey and support men's interests.

Society's perception and images of 'good' and 'bad' women exert a strong influence on women so that it is not easy for these women to formulate and defend their personal interests. For example, despite rejection and condemnation of frequent domestic violence which occurs in this region, women pointed to women, alcohol and poverty rather than men as the source of domestic violence. *'Men are violent to their wives usually under the influence of drunkenness...caused by economic problems. If women understand, there will be no fight...if women are more patient, not always grumbling, men will not get emotional... Poverty is the source of domestic violence* (RG1, October 2001).

Many cases of domestic violence went unreported since women victims felt that by revealing the cases they would put themselves to shame because the community would accuse them of being disobedient and unfaithful wives (LGO14; LGO15; RG1, October 2001). Victimized women contradicts both Islamic teaching and Malay cultural values similarly. While stating that it is the obligation of husbands to be providers of the household, Islamic teaching also states that men must refrain from bad treatment which may lead to bodily harm. Malay cultural values discredit a man who holds his wife against her will (de-Steurs, 1960:33).

How Do Gendered Household Relationships Influence Women's Participation in Local Governance?

Household and local governance interact dialectically. Women's engagement in local governance seems to be significantly determined by household relations. With the major share of housework being done by women and the presumed position of males as head

of households, women in *kelurahan* Melayu rarely attend community meetings. While invitation letters which were distributed by *kelurahan* officials to households did not mention that community meetings were aimed only at men, both men and women considered these invitations as forwarded to men since discussing and making decisions on community issues is considered as 'men's business' as head of household (LGO14; RG1 October 2001). Only a few women have ever been specifically invited and have attended community meetings and these women are delegations of PKK, Posyandu (*Pos Pelayanan Terpadu* or Integrated Health Service clinic) and leaders of *perwiridan*. In the meetings, men sat in front and spoke while women sat at the back, kept silent and only spoke at the end of the meetings (Field notes, 16/10/01).

How gendered household relationships influence women's participation in engaging in community activities or in local governance was insightfully explained in detail by women from the *perwiridan* as follows:

(Participant): *In our region, kelurahan Melayu, the differences in the roles between husbands and wives are still very strong, because the husbands consider that women have to be only at home, so automatically they [men] do not want to do housework anymore. But some husbands have been more developed [progressive], their wives work in paid jobs, so they work together. But still there is adat...if a husband does housework, it seems to others that the woman in that house no longer has any meaning. Instead in our religion, Islam, men have an obligation to help their wives. But in tradition if sometimes husbands help wives with the housework, it is perceived as if the wives 'menokohi' (make a fool of) the husbands. This is because adat posits men higher than women. In fact, based on daily experience the roles of men and women have the same. While men work in paid jobs, there are also many women who work to earn money. The problem is tradition. If we asked our husbands to help us then we will be considered as 'kualat' (doomed).*

(Researcher): *Based on Malay culture, is it an obligation for wives to beautify themselves for their husbands?*

(Participant): *Yes. But even if a wife does not beautify herself, a husband should not make it a problem. He should just warn his wife...that he will look for another woman. So women here are still considered in the second position. 'Your duty is at home, do not participate in conversation'. If there is a community meeting in this area, women cannot speak. But women do want to speak. We want to have a voice, but if our husbands are there too, we automatically know that we cannot speak.*

(Participant): *I would be scolded*

(Participant): *I dared not to look at my husband when we met at the community meeting. I felt shy.*

(Researcher): *Do prior to leaving home husbands remind their wives not to speak at such meetings?*

(Participant): *No, but it is our daily reality* (RG1, October 2001).

Despite diversity among regions, there is a similar pattern of women's reluctance to attend community meetings and speak in public especially when men or husbands also attend meetings. *Malu* (shyness) and *takut* (fear) contribute to women's reluctance to speak up in public. In the FGD with *perwiridan* from other parts of Medan, fear of husbands, government and community criticism were pointed out as factors that limit women from participating in community activities (RG2, October 2001).

The dichotomy between the sexes in *kelurahan Melayu* is evident not only in the households but extended into public life. Although in some circumstances men and women may work together, especially in conducting community service, there is obviously a division of roles and responsibility between women and men in their community obligations. In *kerja bakti* (voluntary work) men dig ditches and cut grass, while women sweep, collect the garbage and provide drinks. In *STM* (neighbourhood associations) women and men work together at times of mourning. Men shop for the needs of the mourning and women give flowers. There are also religious groupings for men. In addition, once a month on Friday at the community meeting hall, men, women, and officials from the *kelurahan* gather to read the Quran together (*perwiridan akbar*) as mentioned earlier (RG1, October 2001).

With women's absence in public activities and decision making, it is easy to assume that women themselves lack interest in politics and public matters. As a *kelurahan* official commented:

It is very difficult to ask women to participate in gotong royong (mutual cooperation). They will reject this idea and have many arguments... such as that they do not have time since they have to feed their children, cook, clean the

house. Other women say that they cannot come because they do not have enough money for transportation to attend the meetings (LGO14, December 2001).

Other female *kelurahan* officials even described women in this area as lazy, claiming that they did not have many things to do (LGO13, December 2001).

On the other hand, women at the grassroots level explain their difficulties in attending community activities and meetings as deriving more from their limited time because of their responsibilities at home.

(Researcher): *Why didn't women attend the community meeting?*

(Participant): *In the afternoon women are always busy, providing things because at 2 pm men will go fishing. At night it is impossible...we are very tired and we have to educate and take care of children. If not when do we have time to take care of the children?*

(Participant): *At night we have to service our husbands [giggle].*

(Researcher): *Do you have interest if being elected in a community association?*

(Participant): *How can it be?...Our work at home seems to be everlasting...Housework will never finish.*

(Participant): *Nobody will choose us. Even when we want to know about community issues and ask our husbands what the discussions in community meetings are about...they say 'you don't need to know, you are just mothers' (RG1, October 2001).*

Women's multiple burdens at the household level also obstructed women from attending training provided by local government. In many cases women come late to the training and education programs since they have to serve their husbands first, or go to the fields and take care of the children (LGO5, October 2001).

Despite the absence of women in community meetings, women in *kelurahan* Melayu participate actively in *perwiridan*. Due to the limited space for women in public activities, *perwiridan* seems to provide an alternative space for women's empowerment.

Extending the Values of Perwiridan

Female members of the *pengajian* are also members of the *perwiridan*. While reading the Quran together is the core of *perwiridan* activity, *pengajian* emphasises teaching women how to read the Quran and to become faithful Moslems. Thus, *pengajian* is more individually oriented since its aim is to increase individual knowledge on Islamic teachings. Not all members of the *perwiridan* join *pengajian*: this depends on each woman's motivation. There was a split of opinion among women in FGD in discussing the significance of these two activities. The leader of the *perwiridan* and a few members argued that *pengajian* is more important since it is useless to participate in *perwiridan* if women do not understand and do not know how to read the Quran. But most of the members of the *perwiridan* considered *perwiridan* as more important to them because in *perwiridan* they may use the opportunity to learn together, to share and to chat with each other (see Photo 1 and 2 page 185) The higher attendance of women in the *perwiridan* which is held once a week in members' houses seems to justify women's preference for *perwiridan*.

Another significant activity of *perwiridan* is *arisan lingkungan* (neighbourhood self rotating credit scheme). *Arisan* is held once a month. Despite its name, the *arisan* is aimed more at strengthening solidarity among the community members rather than being profit oriented. According to these women *arisan* is very important for them because at least once a month they can meet in a relaxing atmosphere with other women. *'The purpose of arisan is for silaturahmi (psychological bond), so that we can meet once a month to chat... so that we will not be stressed. Once a month we gather and attend arisan not so as to have much money, but to be happy. It is better that we gather than to be in stress'* (RG1, October 2001). Thus, *arisan* serves as a 'stress relieving mechanism' for grassroots women in this area.

In the midst of the limited public space for Malay women in *kelurahan* Melayu to gather, *perwiridan* plays a strategic role in their lives. *Perwiridan* provides room for women to go out from their houses and routine daily activities and meet with other women to discuss their feelings, household economic issues, children's education,

health, and other community problems. It gives women the opportunity to go outside their homes without facing challenges and rejection by their husbands since *perwiridan* is considered by community members, male and female, and local government as an appropriate reason for women to gather because here they learn about the religious teachings which are fundamental for the Malay culture. Thus, it is wrong to perceive *perwiridan* as merely a place to read the Quran. After the reading of the Quran has finished, the owner of the house provides some food and drinks. Each member of the *perwiridan* contributes money which is given to the house owner to cover some of the expenses for food and other refreshments provided. It is during this time that they discuss about daily life problems in their households and communities. I noticed that while women felt uncomfortable speaking in public/community forums, they discussed community issues in a relaxed way with other women in the *perwiridan* (Field notes October 2001).

In the *perwiridan* group women developed self confidence and pride. Explaining the unproductive local government credit scheme and comparing it with their *arisan*, these women pointed out that equity, transparency and justice should be the principles of government in implementing its activities and programs:

(Participant): *Look at our arisan; we are disciplined in paying our contribution and everybody gets their turn. But if the money comes from government...well, it's from the government, we do not have to repay it. Much government money has been corrupted, but the corruptors are safe and well.*

(Participant): *Yes...if the government let those big guys go free despite their corruptions why should they chase and punish people who only received small amounts of money?*

(Participant): *We never have disputes in our arisan. This is because we know that all of us will receive equal benefits and opportunities. We know that we will all have the opportunity to have our money back. Each of us will contribute Rp.1,000 for the death of a community member. Some money will be given to help cover the expenses of the perwiridan (RG1, October 2001).*

They suggested that people would willingly contribute to and participate in local development schemes if they were certain that they would receive a fair share of the benefits of development.

Local government also apparently recognises *perwiridan*, using it to disseminate information, institute development programs and carry out government programs (LGO13; LGO14, October 2001). However, *perwiridan* members are rarely invited to discuss development programs in community meetings (RG1, October 2001).

Perwiridan also establishes solidarity among community members. In cases of misfortune or poverty, such as death, the *perwiridan* gives money to those affected, which is taken from its members' monthly contribution. Women in *perwiridan* also take part in cultural and religious ceremonies in relation to the misfortunes that other members of the community face. In the midst of poverty among members of this community, voluntary assistance which is carried out by women is very important because it will enable members of community, especially the poor, to fulfil their cultural and religious obligations which are central to the life of the Malay community.

Members of *perwiridan* actively monitored unjust treatment of other members of the community. For example, they challenged the discriminatory treatment of the school which only contributed some money to the students whose fathers died, while when a mother died, there was no assistance given to the student. These women contributed some money to a student whose mother died and continuously reminded the teacher of his obligation to visit the family of the dead. Eventually the teacher did visit the mourning family (RG1, October 2001).

Through studying and reading the Quran and relating it to daily life, women's religious groupings may empower women by creating their self-identity and extending their participation in the community. Thus, *perwiridan* allows a sense of participation and belonging in the most immediate sense which was unavailable to most women in other aspects of their lives.



Photo 1: Women in *perwiridan*: Learning through sharing.



Photo 2: *Perwiridan* meeting in a member's home: An enjoyable and stress relieving mechanism and space for women's empowerment in *kelurahan* Melayu.

In her study on women's religious groupings in Syria, Barazangi (1999) finds that by using a personal, quiet approach rather than direct confrontation, these women succeeded in opening up and maintaining spaces for women within the community. She says:

The question of women's democratization in this group, therefore, is not whether or not these women take their place explicitly in the public decision making process. Rather, it involves their ability to privately argue their case and their understanding of the circumstances that surround each particular decision and each issue, and working with the situation to ensure that their voice is being heard and their place is being preserved (Barazangi, 1999:142).

Women and Local Government Service Delivery

In *kelurahan* Melayu, there have in fact been some government programs especially directed at women such as PKK (Women's Welfare Movement) and Puskesmas (*Pusat kesehatan masyarakat*/ public primary health care centre). Formally, PKK is described as an integrated part of the *kelurahan* government with its own staff and programmes. As I described in Chapter Four, PKK has 'ten point' programmes which are nationally designed. In reality PKK in this area has long been inactive due to the lack of grassroots women's interest in participating in programs offered by PKK. Women in this area rarely participated because programs were conducted in the afternoon when they were busy doing their housework. PKK also required an individual contribution of Rp.10,000/month, which was considered too expensive. Women perceived that PKK programs and activities had yet to address their interests and needs (RG1, October 2001).

Local women as yet do not seem to make the most of services provided by government. For example, the *kelurahan* government provides additional food for babies who are considered undernourished. Despite the widespread poverty in this area, only a few women came with their babies to this program. According to local government officials, women's passivity in using government facilities is due to their low education since most women in this area only graduated from elementary level (LGO12; LGO13; LGO14, October 2001). Sometimes *kelurahan* officials have to come to pick up a baby

themselves and take it to the Posyandu (Integrated health service clinic) while their mothers do housework (LGO12, October 2001). A woman who is responsible for this service commented *'I do not know why these women do not come to this programme since it is free. They must be either lazy or feel that they are so rich that they do not take this free food for their babies'* (LGO12, October 2001). The poor achievement of the government's family planning in the area, which is reflected in the small numbers of participants in the family planning program and families with many children, is also considered by the *kelurahan* officials to be the result of the low education of the women.

However according to the women, the quality of the government services has been disappointing and its approach has been insensitive to women's situations. The quality of the government's health service is poorer than that provided by private health service centres and this situation is perceived as being discriminatory to the poor. There seems to be mistrust of health services provided by government.

(Participant): *I think the services and the quality if we use *kartu sehat* (a card that can be used to have free access to health services provided by government) is different than if we pay [laughter]...Don't write my name.*

(Participants): *The doctor rarely comes ...*

(Participant): *In Puskesmas whatever disease or illness we have, we'll get the same medicine, I have experienced it.*

(Participant): *Of course it is different from going to the [private] doctor ...*

(Participant): *Well, that's why they call it public service.*

(Participant): *If the service is free then they should provide good medicine. It should not be that if it is free than the quality of the medicine is lower than if we pay. For the poor they give *kartu sehat*, but the medicine is not good. Well, the poor will never be healthy, only those who are rich will stay healthy. It should not only be the rich who are healthy...we also want to be healthy (RG1, October 2001).*

In terms of the insensitivity of the government's approach to delivering services one woman told me:

I will not come to the government's public health service anymore. I'm afraid. I brought my son here to have immunisations and accidentally he dropped the bottle of medicine; it was not broken though. I apologized. The nurse was very angry at me. I will not come again...they will scold us (RG1, October 2001).

The government appears to ignore women's low level of formal education since many local government services aimed at women have been implemented without providing women with understandable and adequate information regarding the services, which leads to women's reluctance in using these services. For example, some women perceived that immunisation provided by government is not good because after having immunisations their children had a fever. They told other women their experiences which caused other women in this area to be afraid to have their children immunised. They did not have information on the normal side effects of immunisations and how to treat them.

Despite the existence of the Puskesmas in this area, women prefer to go to *dukun beranak* (a traditional midwife). According to these women, giving birth in Puskesmas is too expensive for them. Puskesmas charges Rp.150,000 (US \$15) for a child's delivery since *kartu sehat* can only be used for pregnancy related matters, not for the birth. On the other hand, women can negotiate the cost and method of payment with a traditional midwife which suits their economic condition. The traditional midwife also provides post natal care to both mother and baby by regularly visiting women at their home. Moreover, women feel more relaxed in discussing the problems they face since the traditional midwife is friendly and patient in explaining traditional methods in taking care of mother's and baby's health in an easily understandable way (RG1, October 2001). Thus, the government is yet to realise the principle of affordability and personal closeness which is crucial in delivering services to grassroots women with low economic capacity and a low level of formal education.

There are two main government programs in *kelurahan* Melayu that are aimed at dealing with economic poverty within the community: JPS (*Jaring Pengaman Sosial* or Social Safety Net) which gives loans and distributes free rice, and GNOTA (*Gerakan Nasional Orang Tua Asuh* or Foster Parents' National Movement) which provides

financial assistance to enable children from poor families to have education. In ensuring that these programs reach the poorest members of the community, government requires prospective recipients to have *surat miskin* (a letter stating that the person is poor). The letter is issued by the *lurah* (head of urban village) whose decision is primarily based on the condition of the house of the applicants. Based on this criterion, people with houses made of bricks would not get this letter.

Women were not very enthusiastic about getting loans from the JPS program since they considered the process to be complicated and the amount given to be insignificant. As a woman in FGD said *'In order to get Rp.100,000 we have to make a proposal and bring it along with the surat miskin to kantor kelurahan. It's [the amount of US\$10] not enough to start a business'*.

Some women returned the money to the *kelurahan* because they considered it as 'just creating headaches' and others kept the money and did not pay back the loan. They argued that since government was not concerned with larger amounts of government money that had been corrupted and not repaid, it should not be a problem for people who received a small government loan not to pay their loan (RG1, October 2001).

Despite government's intention to help the poor, women consider that these programs do not have much relevance to them due to the unfair, nontransparent and complicated process in the distribution of these programs. In these women's views, local government has been unjust and discriminatory in distributing JPS and GNOTA since determination of who receives the benefits of these programs is based more on personal preferences of *kelurahan* officials who distribute them than the formal stated criteria:

(Participant): *Those who get the GNOTA are not the children of the poor, but rich people with brick houses.*

(Participant): *We do not know who selects them.*

(Participant): *First you should ask for a surat miskin from the Lurah.*

(Participant): *But those people are not eligible, their houses are made of brick*

(Participant): *In distributing the JPS here, if he is an influential man, he can get up to Rp.40 million. And when he does not repay it, nothing will happen to him. But for us...we only get Rp.100,000 and if we do not repay, night and day government officials will haunt us* (RG1, October 2001).

Government's performance in delivering education also receives much attention in discussions among women in this area. Despite the existence of elementary and intermediate public schools in this area, there are many dropout children. Malays are perceived as not as keen as the Bataks (another ethnic group in Indonesia) in providing education for their children (LGO14; LGO15, October 2001). This view is supported by a village woman in the FGD who argued that should parents have more appreciation for their children's education, they would not let their children drop out of school since the school fee in public school is only Rp.3,000/month (less than US 50 cents) which is equal to the price of 3 shrimps (RG1, October 2001).

The implementation of JPS and GNOTA has not only been problematic to the community but also to the *kelurahan* officials, especially the *kepala lingkungan* (head of a ward) who has to interact directly with the community in disseminating information and distributing the programs. The *kelurahan* made the decision on who received these programs based on data on applicants' household. The problem is that these data are based on previous survey that was conducted for a long time ago before the implementation of the program. During that time some of the poor households have made progress, while some others which were previously better off have fallen into poverty. Thus, the *kelurahan* does not have data that can capture the real and present living condition of the community (LGO14, October 2001). Adding to this problem is the dishonesty among the community, as another head of a ward noted:

We have to be very careful in distributing the rice. Women are not always honest. In order to gain this assistance they sometimes cheat. Sometimes I have to challenge women whom I know are not poor but still asking for rice. 'Do you want to become poor? Don't you have a house made of brick? Usually they feel ashamed and no longer ask for the rice (LGO15, October 2001).

The affordability of the public school fee is questionable, however due to the other additional costs that parents have to bear. Women's perception was that public school should provide cheaper education costs than private school but with additional expenses

they needed to pay in public school, the cost difference was not great. In the FGD below women explained why they felt public education costs are higher than they should be:

(Participant): *The cost is not only for books. If it was only for books, then it would be acceptable. But public schools demand too much.*

(Participant): *They asked my son to pay for the wood he used in the woodwork class. They said they will return the money, but up to now the teacher has yet to return it...I just let it go...I am tired of that.*

(Participant): *Sometimes the teacher asks for infaq (voluntary donations which are usually given to the poor, orphans and widows). I do not want to pay because infaq is for religious activities, it does not have anything to do with school.*

(Participant): *I had to buy all the new books although my child remained in the same level because she failed. I went to the head of school but still he asked me to buy all the new books. Why can't my daughter use her old books? ...the content of the books is just the same.*

(Participant): *They say it is a public school, but my spending is much higher for my child in public school than my other child in private school. It is unacceptable. I do not mind paying higher fees for the private school because I knew before that the fee is high, and it does not have many additional costs.*

(Researcher): *Have you reported these cases?*

(Participant): *I am afraid that the school will expel my child (RG1, October 2001).*

Women reacted in many ways in dealing with the higher costs in public schools. Some women just let their children leave school, and some moved their children to study at *madrasah* (Islamic school) which they considered as not demanding high costs while their children gained a deeper knowledge of religion. Women's rejection of the high cost of public school was also reflected in their absence at the parent teacher meetings which discuss costs and fees related to children's education. A woman comments:

(Participant): *That school is tricky. When the school invited us to come to the meetings, we, mothers did not want to come...because if we come and speak up, still there will be additional costs and school fee rises...so what is it we come for?*

(Participant): *Yesterday, some of us did not sign the document which states parents' support for the [fee] rise, because if we sign it, then, it means we agree with the rise in school fee (RG1, October 2001).*

Analysing the Waste Problem

Public cleanliness is an urgent issue in this area. The neighbourhood was swampy because of the daily *pasang perdani* (tide) from the *paloh* (surrounding sea). The *pasang perdani* comes twice a day, in the morning and evening and brings with it garbage and other waste. The rubbish left behind by the *pasang perdani* is left to spread all over the neighbourhood.

The *pasang perdani* puts more burdens on women since daily cleaning of the house and surroundings is considered to be women's obligation. However, women expressed their frustration in dealing with the rubbish, and some even ignored the rubbish and stopped cleaning. They argued: *We clean and sweep this rubbish in the morning and in the evening the rubbish will be brought here again by the pasang perdani. It is useless* (RG1, October 2001).

Sometimes the *kelurahan* government organizes both men and women to participate in *kerja bakti* (volunteer work in mutual cooperation) to clean the neighbourhood surroundings. *Kelurahan* government usually uses *perwiridan* to inform and invite women to take part in this activity. While men dig ditches, women carry the rubbish and provide drinks. This is not too effective since the cleaning is not conducted in an integrated way, which means that while one neighbourhood cleans and digs their ditches, the rubbish from other neighbourhoods will be brought back to the neighbourhood by the tide.

Besides organising *kerja bakti*, local government in *kelurahan* Melayu has also provided one collective garbage bin, which is made of cement, for every neighbourhood. It is hoped that households in that neighbourhood will put their rubbish in this bin. In addition, the *kelurahan* government provides one cart which will take the rubbish from the collective rubbish bin in that *kelurahan* to the final collection point. The community pays Rp.300 per month per household for this service. However, this

strategy has been ineffective in realising public cleanness in this area. The complexity of issues involved with public cleanness was explained by women in this *kelurahan* as follows:

(Researcher): *What do you think of your neighbourhood?*

(Participant): *It's dirty...*

(Researcher): *Why?*

(Participant): *Because of the pasang perdani. Everyday the garbage from the sea will be brought here.*

(Participant): *It's because the community is not conscious about cleanliness. They do not want to burn their garbage. Before, there was a bak sampah (collective rubbish bin) here. But only a few threw their garbage here and others did not want to burn the garbage in the bin. There was one bin for each neighbourhood.*

(Researcher): *Is there any assistance from the kelurahan?*

(Participant): *Kereta sorong (cart), but it rarely comes.*

(Participant): *So...we throw our garbage into the river.*

(Participant): *The pasang perdani sometimes even reaches as high as our thighs*

(Researcher): *So what do you expect from the kelurahan?*

(Participant): *A clean environment.*

(Participant): *If there was somebody who collected the iuran each month, Rp. 1000 per family, 1 neighborhood consists of 50 families...Rp.50,000 could be collected and this would be enough to pay for the one who collects the garbage.*

(Participant): *As long as I have lived here, it has never been done this way.*

(Researcher): *Would all members of the community be willing to pay?*

(Participant): *The problem is the money. Some will agree but some will say that it is government's duty. They say, just throw your rubbish, why should we pay?*

(Participant): *We can use plastic bags.*

(Participant): *When the kelurahan gave us each a rubbish bin, some of us used it as a water jug and place to store rice.*

(Participant): *Well, it's because the bins are so nice. I see that my water jug has been very old, while the bin is new and nice, so I use it as my water jug.*

(Participant): *Other people stole my bin.*

(Participant): *Water and rice are more important for our daily life...(RG1, October 2001).*

The FGD above highlights the intertwining of the lack of consciousness about cleaning the environment among the community members, poverty, and the insensitivity and inconsistency of local government's approaches in dealing with public cleanliness contribute to the ineffectiveness in realizing a clean environment in this area. Hence, as suggested by women in this FGD, public cleanness should be the concern and responsibility of both community members and local government. The misuse of the distributed rubbish bins suggests that in delivering services to the community, the local government needs to understand the living conditions and the issues of greatest concern to the community.

Participating in Neighbourhood Governance

Women have also contributed actively in helping *kelurahan* government carry out their tasks by becoming *kader* (cadre/head of a ward's assistants with no or very low payment). *Kader* play an important role in local governance since they act as a bridge between government *kelurahan* and the community. *Kader* assist *kepala lingkungan* (head of a ward) in distributing invitations and information regarding community affairs to the community, as well collecting retribution from the community. These female cadres significantly reduce the work load of *kepala lingkungan* as they are the ones who are responsible for invitations and dissemination of information through their direct visits to community members' households. Although some of them are illiterate, they can effectively perform their role since they usually know other members in their community well. *'I do not know what would happen if I do not have kader to help me do my duties. They have helped me a lot. I think I would run out of energy if kader did not help me'* (LGO14, October 2001).

Most *kader* in *kelurahan* Melayu are women. The *kepala lingkungan* personally approach and select women from their *lingkungan* (neighbourhood) and ask their willingness to help the head of ward as *kader*. Some *kepala lingkungan* pay small amounts of money to the *kader* whenever they have fulfilled their duty, and the payment is taken from the salary that the head of ward receives from the *kelurahan*. There is no actual amount that should be paid to the cadres since it depends on the negotiation between them. Most of the women willingly become cadres because by being cadres they may go out of the home and socialise with other members of the community and at the same time may help bring information to other members of community and help the head of ward in his duties (RG1; LGO13; LGO14, October 2001). Sometimes there is education for cadres through informal workshops on services provided by *kelurahan*.

While there were many women working as cadres, at the time when the research was conducted, there were only two women in the whole municipality of Medan who had become head of a ward. There is no government regulation that restricts women from being head of a ward, however, the demanding tasks expected of head of ward along with the perceptions of the community contributes to women's reluctance in becoming head of a ward. Being a head of ward is a demanding task since they interact directly and frequently with the community and solve various problems. Many community members perceive that head of ward is not a suitable responsibility for women since head of ward have to go out at night and deal with violence (LGO15; RG1, October 2001).

This view is challenged by a woman who is a head of ward, who argued that being a woman did not obstruct her capability in carrying out her obligations. For example, if a community member needed her to come late at night she would go accompanied by her children. If she thought that the situation would threaten her safety, she would call the police or other *kelurahan* official to come along with her. She felt that being a woman also provided advantages in dealing with disputes among community members and within families since the community respected her and avoided using harsh words or physical violence in solving their disputes in the presence of a female head of ward.

However, she admitted that the community had yet to accept single unmarried woman as head of ward. As she noted:

There is an unwritten regulation among the community that prohibits single unmarried women from becoming kepala lingkungan since they think it will create more problems. For example, people would not trust unmarried women in solving disputes between husbands and wives. They would say 'How can she solve problems in our family while she herself has not married yet?' (LGO15, October 2001)

There are social and economic considerations that make the job of *kepala lingkungan* unattractive to women in *kelurahan* Melayu. Besides challenges that come from the community which perceive the tasks of *kepala lingkungan* as unsuitable for women, women themselves consider that becoming *kepala lingkungan* is not economically beneficial since it consumes much time, which women do not have, and the payment is minimal. Women explained these considerations as follow:

(Researcher): *Should it be only men who are appropriate to be kepala lingkungan?*

(Participant): *Yes, it should be. This job takes too much time for women. Members of the community will asked for letters from kepling [kepala lingkungan] frequently.*

(Participant): *Other people also do not appreciate woman as kepling. They undermine them.*

(Participant): *Well, our president is a woman...*

(Participant): *A president has guards...*

(Participant): *If there is a fight, people will ask for the kepala lingkungan. The kepala lingkungan will be brought to the sites.*

(Participant): *Women's safety will be threatened if they become kepala lingkungan.*

(Participant): *I am sure my husband would not allow me to become kepala lingkungan.*

(Researcher): *Do you have an ambition to become a Lurah (head of village)?*

(Participants): *We want to, if we have the education... [laughter].*

(Participant): *A Lurah's work is mostly signing documents. If we became a Lurah, we would have much money. If we become a kepala lingkungan...it is not enough even to buy cigarettes, let alone to cover household expenses (RG1, October 2001).*

The discussion in this FGD also suggested that despite the seeming unattractiveness of politics to women, women in *kelurahan* Melayu have aspirations as to define what good local government is:

(Researcher): *What does good local government mean to you?*

(Participants): *Good and honest government.*

(Participant): *Just government which treats and serves people equally.*

(Participant): *Prompt and well run service delivery.*

(Participant): *For our interest, avoiding the soaring of prices. The price of sembako [acronym for sembilan bahan pokok meaning nine basic necessities] needs to be stabilised... like in the time of the previous regime.*

(Participant): *The most important thing is that there is security so that we can earn our living...so that it will not be so difficult to earn a living. For example, the recent demonstration by the becak (thrisaw) drivers in front of the municipality office... the mayor restricted the operation of becaks because they were considered as contributing to the traffic jam in Medan. Of course they demonstrate...how can they earn their living? So the government should think wisely and provide jobs for them before limiting their areas in earning for their livelihoods, so that they will not create chaos.*

(Participant): *If the prices of sembako becomes so expensive, of course there are many robbers...the people are hungry.*

(Participant): *For our neighbourhood's interest...we need roads that are not muddy and also a clean environment.*

(Participant): *The cost of education should be lowered...if possible all should have the opportunity to benefit from the orang tua asuh program.*

(Participant): *Accessible and affordable local government services, especially health and education*

(Participants): *Reduce the price of BBM [fuel] and fares.*

(Participant): *Heads of neighbourhood need to enhance their performance so that we may have a good society (RG1, October 2001).*

These definitions of strategies emanating from good local government highlight a demand for greater roles and responsibility from local government to the community. Head of neighbourhood plays a critical role since *kepala lingkungan* is the extension arm of local government which is closest and the most accessible to women. Interestingly, this FGD highlights that women do have specific interests as can be seen from the word '*For our interest...*' and '*For our neighbourhood's interest*'. To these women, local government needs to fulfil both women's and the community's interests. Women have a comprehensive understanding of good local government which goes beyond the ability to delivery services efficiently, to local government which is ethical and sensitive to diverse interests in providing services to the community and in performing its duties and roles.

Summary

This chapter has argued for the centrality of household relations in discussing women's participation in local governance. Household relations are more than about interactions, it is also about control and identity. Women's lack of self confidence which significantly contributes to their marginality in local governance relates to definitions imposed by men and the community of what women's identity should be through their daily assigned tasks. Gendered relationships at the household level have obstructed women's capability to participate in local governance in the way that they often undermine women's self confidence, and instil fear of their husbands and the community. This contributes to women's reluctance to speak in public.

Gender relations in the Melayu households are greatly influenced by *adat* and religion which also controls all aspects of the *kelurahan* Melayu community life. *Adat* and religion shape women's role and position in the Melayu's community in *kelurahan* Melayu. By and large women perceived that oppression of women does not emanate from religion but from the norms and cultural practices in the community which actually contradict religious teachings. Women understand that male bias in

interpretation of religion which was adopted in *adat* has been used to subordinate women. However, society's perceptions and images of what constitutes a 'good woman' exerts a strong influence on women so that it is not easy for these women to think outside this stereotype in order to formulate their personal interests.

This chapter has also discussed how religious groupings such as *perwiridan* can play a significant role in empowering grassroots women. *Perwiridan* provides women with a diversion from their daily routines and chores while also providing psychological healing for women through providing a space in which they can share their feelings and experiences with other women. Through this interaction women become cognizant of their identity and build solidarity. *Perwiridan* provides an alternative space and setting for social interaction and support for women, the benefits of which are also extended to community members as a whole.

Contrary to the frequent assumption that women have no knowledge and interest in politics, the case study from *kelurahan* Melayu reveals that women not only have the ability to analyse politics but they also have contributed much to community development through their free contribution in cleaning the neighbourhood's surroundings, dealing with poverty, providing a social safety network and disseminating information from local government to the community. Despite women's contribution, local government information and services frequently fails to reach women due to the lack of understanding of cultural and structural constraints women experience in their daily lives. Thus, in delivering its services local government needs to take into consideration gender differences in interests and needs among the community members. By incorporating women's interests and needs in delivering services, local government may reach the poorest among the community more efficiently and effectively. The crucial issues, then, are to recognize women's contribution, and to ensure and that their voice can be heard and incorporated in public decision making so that development processes at the local level may effectively benefit women and men as stakeholders in local governance. This will be the focus of the next chapter which looks at SPI, a grassroots organisation which focus on women's empowerment in Deli Serdang.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SERIKAT PEREMPUAN INDEPENDEN (SPI): TRANSLATING RHETORIC INTO ACTION

Introduction

This chapter explores how SPI (*Serikat Perempuan Independen* or Independent Women's Union) as a rural women's group struggles to enhance women's involvement in local governance in Deli Serdang. It reveals the centrality of SPI in facilitating collective mobilisation at the grassroots level which is very important should women in Deli Serdang intend to have their voice heard and integrated in public decision making.

After a brief introduction to HAPSARI, an organisation through which SPI evolved, the evolution of SPI, this chapter explores the interlocking of private and public patriarchy which contributes to the complexity facing SPI in empowering women in Deli Serdang. Emphasis is placed on how rural women act within these constraining structures, how SPI influences and changes women's lives and how women use these changes based on women's accounts of their daily life experiences. It highlights the dialectics of personal and collective empowerment in unravelling the interlocking of private and public patriarchy in Deli Serdang. By raising women's self-esteem and confidence in reconstructing gendered relations at household and community levels, SPI opens up a plurality of public spaces and broadens alternative arenas for political expression for women which is crucial for the realisation of good local governance.

HAPSARI (Harapan Perempuan Sukasari)

The emergence of SPI Deli Serdang is inseparable from the working of an NGO called Hapsari²⁷ (*Harapan Perempuan Sukasari* which means the Hope of Sukasari Women) since it was Hapsari that gave birth to SPI. Sukasari is a village in Deli Serdang which is one of the regencies in North Sumatra. It is situated about 60 km from Medan, the capital city of North Sumatra. Starting as a village women's working group, Hapsari in cooperation with PKBI (Indonesia Family Planning Centre)²⁸ Medan provides education and play program for pre school children.

This education and play program for children in Sukasari village was operated using the community of Sukasari's resources. One of the members of the community provided his house to be used as the pre-school children's learning and playing studio (*sanggar belajar dan bermain anak*) while all activities were carried out by women of Sukasari. Many women came to this studio to accompany their children. While waiting for their children, they chatted with each other. Seeing this opportunity, women who organised the studio creatively used the pre-school as an entry point to raise awareness of mothers whose children attended the studio by forming groups for mothers in which women discussed problems they faced in daily life. Through sharing their daily life experiences, women realized that there is discrimination and oppression of women in families, villages, and in society (NGO1²⁹, November 2001; HAPSARI, 2003). As one of the founders of HAPSARI and the present leader recalls:

I am a daughter of an ustad (a person who teaches Islamic principles). And as a female and as the daughter of an ustad many regulations which have limited my movement have been put on me. There were so many things that I was not permitted to do because I am a female. Even going outside home was considered unholy (haram). Through conversations with other women in this village, we found out that we have experienced many unpleasant things in our families and communities because we are women (NGO1, November 2001).

²⁷ This group was named Hapsari (with lower case) when it was first established in 1990. In 1993, it was changed into HAPSARI (with upper case).

²⁸ PKBI is an NGO focusing on women's reproductive health, including teenagers' related issues.

²⁹ NGO refer to research participant from non governmental organisations

In 1993 the Sukasari village government constructed a building for pre-school children's learning and playing studio under the management of Hapsari. At this time, women of Hapsari changed the name Hapsari into HAPSARI which signifies the expansion of its status and activities, not only to be recognized as a name for a pre-school children's playing and learning studio, but more as a nongovernmental organisation which focuses on dealing with problems facing village women. Since then its feminist focus has grown stronger through gender training, NGO cadres training and advocacy for village women.

In the early stages women of HAPSARI sought to reach out to other women in their village by attending *perwiridan*. By sharing their life stories and experiences, they encouraged women in *perwiridan* not to discriminate against their daughters since discrimination will only hurt and victimize their children (NGO1, November 2001). Although they discussed problems and discrimination they faced as women, up to this stage they were yet to know what *jender* (gender) was. It was only after some HAPSARI activists in 1994 were trained by Kalyanamitra (a women's NGO in Yogyakarta) and received books from other NGOs that women of HAPSARI knew that discrimination and oppression they faced as women was a gender issue (NGO1, November 2001). Since 1995 HAPSARI intensified its strategy to campaign for gender issues by using radio as an effective media in reaching out to more people. In 1998 HAPSARI first published *Suara HAPSARI*, a journal which consists of activities, programs and ideas of HAPSARI about addressing gender issues.

HAPSARI was formally registered as an NGO in 1997 due to requirements from domestic and external donors. This status was aimed to make it easier for donors to interact with HAPSARI since the Indonesian government has recognized HAPSARI as a legal formal organisation based on Indonesian law. HIVOS (a Dutch NGO), which is the main donor to HAPSARI, considers HAPSARI as 'a local strategic partner with the capacity to build a women's movement and, at the same time, to facilitate NGOs and

CBOs in North Sumatra in the adoption of a gender and women's perspective' (HIVOS, 2003). HAPSARI also receives aid from domestic NGOs.

From *Perwiridan* to SPI

At the time HAPSARI first started its activities, it was the only NGO focusing on women in Deli Serdang. Women of HAPSARI frequently went to *perwiridan* in other villages in Deli Serdang and shared their experiences. Considering that most women in Deli Serdang participate in *perwiridan* and it is the only place where women may gather and discuss their problems without being suspected and criticised by other members of the community, HAPSARI strategically used *perwiridan* as an entry point for reaching women (NGO1; CBO3, November 2001).

Many women were interested in becoming members of HAPSARI. However, the legal form of HAPSARI when it was first established as a *yayasan* (foundation), did not allow HAPSARI to have a membership system, thus it could not have members. Therefore, HAPSARI encouraged women in villages to form their own organisations and promised that HAPSARI would continue its support to these groups. In 1995, starting from *perwiridan*, women in Bingkat (a village in Deli Serdang) agreed to form a group which they called SPI (Serikat Perempuan Independen or the Union of Independent Women). The word *independen* was chosen to show organisational autonomy of SPI as a women's group and clarify that SPI is not subordinate to HAPSARI or to any other authority. The close relationship between SPI and HAPSARI is described in the following rhyme which was composed by a member of SPI³⁰ in Bingkat:

³⁰ While SPI firstly formed in Deli Serdang, in its latter development it expand to other regions outside Deli Serdang.

Yayasan HAPSARI the companion of SPI. Consultation is its activity. Don't seduce your husband everyday. Just use it when you want to come here (CBO8, November 2001).

This rhyme also implied both the significance of SPI to these women and women's strategy in using their sexuality to negotiate their freedom to go out of their house. Politically, the name and the form *serikat* (union) are also intended to differentiate SPI from another women's organisation in that region, the PKK, which is perceived as the extension of the hand of government (Andi and Zailany, 2002). By defining SPI as a women's organisation, it restricts its membership to women, especially village women, in order to enable women to explore and discuss problems they experience as women more freely. Another consideration is that men will be reluctant in joining SPI because it focuses on women's issues:

We frequently discuss women's intimate issues such as women's reproductive health, sex, and other things. Can men stand at listening to this discussion among women? I think men will not be willing to talk about this issue with us (CBO4, November 2001).

SPI attracted more village women to join in this group since it created an alternative space for women to gather and discuss topics of their interest. Every half month members of SPI meet to gather and discuss issues that they perceive as relevant to their daily life. In adjusting to the availability of time women have, SPI's activities are usually held in the afternoon after women fulfil housework duties and return from *ladang* (dry fields) or their other income generating activities (Field notes 19/11/01). SPI provides women with new information and knowledge about, for example, women's literacy, reproductive health and the importance of women organizing themselves. By and large women are interested in joining SPI discussions groups because in these groups women can share their feelings and ideas and learn, while looking for support in solving their problems:

(Participant): I felt bored just staying at home. My friend told me that there was an organisation in our village where women gathered to learn. I was curious, so I came to a gathering.

*(Participant): In this organisation we were taught to be clever, so I was interested. Firstly, I was taught *ngaji* (reading the Quran), then how to read in*

bahasa [which uses the Latin alphabet]. If it was not for SPI, I would not be able to read.

(Participant): I did not finish my primary education. I can read and write now because I joined this organisation.

(Participant): I joined this group when my child was 8 months. I brought her to our meeting. I joined this organisation because I wanted to know what the organisation does.

(Participant): If I can't attend a meeting I feel sad because I know that I will be left behind. So it is our duty to persuade our husbands to let us go to meetings.

(Participant): I miss the others when we do not meet. Why haven't we met? I always ask if there is no meeting. The closeness between us makes me want to gather. This organisation is a place where we can express our feelings. We discuss our husbands. The organisation teaches us that talking about our husbands is also a learning process...it is not gossiping. It's about how to solve problems.

(Participant): At least I do not have to solve my problems by myself...now I have many friends to share my problems with.

(Participant): By exchanging ideas with other women, it is not difficult for us to solve our problems (CBO3, November 2001).

With the growth of members and the formation of SPI in many villages in Deli Serdang, HAPSARI started to run out of energy because it had to deal with many SPI groups with limited human and financial resources (NGO1, October 2001). Despite the independence declared by SPI, it still depended on HAPSARI for guidance and financial support, thus draining HAPSARI's resources. In facing this problem HAPSARI encouraged women in SPI to form their own organisation. At the same time, HAPSARI provided continuous support for SPI such as: establishing networks with other NGOs, providing information on gender related issues, facilitating seminars and workshops.

In 1999 SPI groups from diverse regions in North Sumatra formed SPI-Sumatra Utara³¹ (SPI-North Sumatra) which is: ‘a mass organisation whose members consist of independent village women’s organisations from diverse sectors, aiming at raising women’s consciousness to struggle and defend women’s interests based on the spirit of sisterhood among women’ (HAPSARI 2001:2). Women determined that the formation of SPI needed to be conducted in a public place so that the community and government know about the existence of this organisation. The declaration which was attended by 500 participants was conducted in front of North Sumatra Governor’s office in Medan.

The formation of SPI-SU was aimed at enabling village women to be more organised and to work together in solving their problems, and also at encouraging village women to become more independent. Based on the principles of justice, rejection of violence, willingness to sacrifice and openness, SPI-SU struggles to achieve its goal which is the realisation of a just society where there is no exploitation between women and men and equal appreciation and respect of women’s and men’s rights. Thus, SPI-SU recognises the diversity of women’s interests, needs and stages of awareness. It calls for unity among women based on the spirit of sisterhood in struggling for women’s interests. According to SPI, sisterhood among women is the spirit to struggle and to defend women’s interests and destiny despite differences in religion, ethnicity, and places of living (Suara HAPSARI 2000; CBO4; November 2001). It consolidates power among women’s groups aiming at enabling women’s groups to be able to work together in solving problems facing women. Unity and solidarity among women as a weapon to free women from various forms of oppression is strongly voiced in the following SPI song:

*It is the time for women
join hands and speak up
rejecting violence
to weave peace*

³¹ From this point onwards I will use SPI-SU in referring to SPI-Sumatra Utara which consists of SPI in five regencies in North Sumatra: Deli Serdang, Asahan, L.Batu, SPI Simalungun, SPI Langkat.

*Women, let's unite
in solidarity
join in SPI
to defend human rights*

*Women, let's fight
fight for one goal
step out in freedom
against all oppressions
against all oppressions*

(HAPSARI 2000:30)

Consciousness raising and the strengthening of sisterhood among women in Deli Serdang are emphasised in SPI programs. Although in some villages there are economic activities for increasing women's income, such as credit schemes and home industries, SPI places greatest emphasis on gender awareness raising through group discussions, *arisan*, theatre, and advocacy on violence against women. Besides half monthly meetings among women in each village, every 3 months SPI-SU in cooperation with HAPSARI holds a *Pertemuan Akbar Perempuan Pedesaan* (Great Meeting of Rural Women) in which members of SPI from diverse villages in Deli Serdang meet together. The decision on which village this meeting will be held in is made by throwing a coin (*undi*). In this event SPI-SU invites local government officials, other community organisations and members of the regional house of representatives. However, these groups of people rarely attend the meeting due to their lack of knowledge and the perceived threat from women organising. As a leader of SPI explains '*Our head of village did not dare to come to this meeting although we invited him. He thought we want to rebel*' (CBO3, November 2001).

The formation of SPI-Sumatra Utara enables HAPSARI to focus on establishing and developing networks with other NGOs and donors. Rather than being directly involved in activities of every SPI group in diverse villages in Deli Serdang, HAPSARI provides assistance to SPI-SU which then channels this assistance to SPI in throughout Deli Serdang. The management and the activities of SPI in villages is the responsibility of SPI-SU. The accompanying role of HAPSARI to SPI continues in the form of providing

financial assistance to fund administration and operational costs (office and equipment), monthly payment for core members of SPI, and establishing networks between SPI and other NGOs. Considering that most SPI organisers are village women who have no or little experience in formal organisation, HAPSARI contributes significantly to the development of SPI's human resources by providing information and materials on gender, organisation management, and by conducting leadership and computer training for women of SPI.

Obstacles Facing Women in Organising: the Interlocking of Private and Public Patriarchy

Women face tremendous problems, challenges and opposition at the household and community level. In the following sections I will discuss how gender relations in the household and the community interactively enforce the marginality of women in local governance.

Gender relations at the household level

Gender relations within the household provide a basis for understanding the form and extent of differences between men and women in local governance. Gender relations in Deli Serdang community are greatly determined by Javanese culture since the majority of the community members in Deli Serdang are Javanese, although there are also some Malays and Bataks. Most of the Javanese in this region are the descendants of those Javanese that came from Java to work as coolies in Sumatra plantations in the 18th century (Stoler, 1985; Nirwana et al., 2002).

Family in the Javanese language is *kulawarga* which means *saudara*, or relationship based on blood. Although by this definition the Javanese society may seem to have an egalitarian concept of family, this term can also be easily translated as *kawulawarga*, including *kawula* (people/servant) and *gusti* (master) which reflects a more hierarchical concept of family. In this ideology of family, the man as the *gusti* is the ruler of the household with full authority and special privileges while other members of the family,

including his wife and children are the *kawula* and should be subservient to their *gusti*. All *kawula* should respect and maintain the prestige and dignity of *gusti* in their family and in society. Obedience to *gusti* is especially emphasised to women since in Javanese culture a wife's happiness or suffering is seen to be determined by obedience to her husband (*swarga nunut neraka katut*) (Ahmad, 1993:50).

There are also mythical gendered roles in Javanese culture. Women's role is described as *ma-telu* (triple *ma*) that is *masak* (cooking), *manak* (giving birth), *macak* (beautification). Men's roles are cynically suggested to be *ma-lima* (five *ma*): *main* (gambling), *minum* (drinking), *madat* (smoking marijuana), *maling* (stealing), *madon* (womanising) (Arimbi et al., 1998:8). These Javanese mythical roles for women then are widely spread and popularised into diverse saying in *bahasa* Indonesia such as three *ur*: *sumur* (bathroom, which refers to women's duty in washing), *kasur* (bed) and *dapur* (kitchen). Based on research among housewives in Yogyakarta, the majority of women accept these myths as *kodrat* (natural talents) which is something that cannot be avoided as part of their life. The reason for this acceptance is that women feel that by holding up these roles, they contribute to family harmony (Arimbi et al., 1998:25). These mythical gendered roles have also been translated and put into practice by other communities outside the Javanese community as if these gendered roles are the traditionally ideal gender roles and indicators of a 'good woman'.

Although women in Deli Serdang also perceive their domestic obligations as unavoidable, they obviously point at these obligations combined with poverty they face as a burden to women, which has also limited their mobility.

(Participant): *If we want to go out, we have to finish housework first, servicing our husband and taking care of children. Then our husband will not be angry at us.*

(Researcher): *What will you do if there is an unexpected meeting and housework has not finished yet?*

(Participant): *It is impossible [to attend]...well it is possible, if we cook first.*

(Participant): *That's why our friends do not want to join the organisation...they are busy working...doing the planting. They are obstructed by economic conditions.*

(Participant): *At first my husband did not allow me to participate in this organisation. He said 'Why is it important for you join an organisation. I am the one who feeds you. You should take care of the children (CBO3, November 2001).*

The perception that women's domestic responsibilities have obstructed women from participating in organisations effectively is also admitted by men. Men who are involved in NGOs explain that women are frequently unable to attend joint meetings with other NGOs especially when the meetings take more than one day and participants have to stay overnight. The most frequent reason mentioned by women in explaining their inability to attend these meetings is that they have to cook and take care of their children (NGO6; NGO10, November 2001). Women often bring their children to meetings, seminars and congresses. These children sit beside their mother or on their mother's lap, sleep, and run across the room while their mothers participate in their activities. Sometimes some women have to breast feed their baby or have to go out of the room to calm their crying children (Field notes 8/10/01). When I asked whether organisers of the activities have considered facilities that would enable women to concentrate on organisational activities while at the same time meeting children's needs, a leader of one organisation commented: *'Up to now NGOs have not considered the provision of facilities that enable women to move and participate freely in organisational activities'* (NGO10, November 2001).

Javanese women have been considered by some as having considerable power in household financial management (Geertz, 1961; Stoler, 1985; Megawangi, 1999). Perceiving the household as a unity of interest, Megawangi (1999: 44) argues that in households men and women work in harmony for the common good of the family. For Javanese women, to serve one's husband is a joy. On the other hand, the husband gives all his income to his wife (income pooling) to be used for common interests. Thus, women have power over financial resources (Megawangi, 1999):

In central Java, a rural household tends to operate as consumption and partial production unit, in which proceeds are pooled among its members. Within this context it is women who dominate the decision making process and control not only family finances but also the allocation of their children's time and labor (Stoler, 1985:194).

The mythical roles of Javanese women discussed above do not reveal the realm of Javanese women's life in Deli Serdang since in addition to their obligations in housework and other reproductive roles, the majority of women also work to earn money for the survival of their household. It would be a luxury for women in Deli Serdang to do only domestic duties; instead they have to do paid work due to the poverty they experience. Many women in this area work as labourers in dry fields. Some women work as petty traders, brick makers, housemaids or tailors. While both husbands and wives in the households engage in paid work, they differ to some extent in how they allocate and spend the money they earn. Women describe these differences as follow:

(Participant): *I have to spend the money we have wisely so that it will be enough to support my family.*

(Participant): *All the money I earn is spent on household needs. I hardly ever have the opportunity to use it for myself.*

(Participant): *If men have money they will gamble... [laughter together].*

(Participant): *well not all men, but most of them. For example, a husband gives the income he earns from grinding, Rp.10,000 to his wife. He says that his salary is Rp.10,000 when in fact it is Rp.15,000...Rp.5,000 is all for him...for his interests...buying togel (gambling).*

(Participant): *That's why women should work.*

(Participant): *Yeah...but not all men are like that. My husband is honest [Other participants laugh]. He gives all he earns to me. But when he wants to buy cigarettes, he will ask me and I will give him the money.*

(Participants): *...well, her husband is honest but not ours.*

(Participant): *Well, your husband obeys you. My husband causes me problems. There is no man who will willingly be defeated by a woman (CBO3, November 2001).*

Thus, in the case of Deli Serdang the concept of family as a unity of interests needs to be examined further since there are differences in priorities between men and women in using the money with men often prioritising their self interests. Also, men do not always give all their income to their wife. As Wolf (1992:66) succinctly argues:

Women may manage or budget household income, but such management needs to be distinguished from controlling decisions about household expenditures...such decision making must not confused with Western conceptions of status or power. Rural Javanese women may be strong and self sufficient, but these qualities do not necessarily indicate that they have power.

Javanese women in North Sumatra are said to have less power than Javanese women in Java since the former do not have knowledge of their husbands' income (Stoler, 1985:194). According to Stoler (1985:33), the different way of life and norms between Javanese women in Java and North Sumatra can be traced back to Dutch colonialism in forming the structure of plantations in North Sumatra:

Javanese women, a small percentage of the coolies, were exploited in the way that they received very low wages and were provided with no living facilities and they were forced to provide sexual services. Because of the situation where coolies were frequently shifted and did not have permanent marriage, has forced women to 'prostitute' themselves, cooked for the unmarried work force, or became the 'bed-servants' of the white colonial staff.

Threats from the community: Conspiring to strengthen patriarchy

Ideas about gender roles in Deli Serdang are based upon the Javanese mythical gendered roles. Thus, there are gendered social expectations within the community in which men are perceived as primary breadwinners while women's obligations are in child rearing and other traditional domestic activities since it is seen as women's *kodrat* (natural talents) to be mothers and wives. There is a saying within the community which defines women's obligations as *suami servis, anak diem, masaknya mateng, badannya cantik untuk suami pulang* (servicing one's husband, educating children, providing good food, and maintaining a well shaped body for one's husband (CBO7, November 2001). A 'good woman' is a woman who can fulfil these traditional gendered roles. Crossing the line of what the community perceived what women ought to be is considered as

improper behaviour and rebellion. *'If we cross the line and move beyond sumur (bathroom), kasur (bed) and dapur (kitchen), it means we have strongly rebelled against our family and community. This perception is very difficult to overcome and it causes women to become allergic to politics'*.

The community in Deli Serdang has ambiguous perceptions of women's roles. While the community accepts women going out of the home to work to earn income, this acceptance does not apply to women who go out to participate in SPI. While women in SPI highly value the knowledge they gain by participating in SPI and frequently cite that this knowledge is beneficial to their family, the community has been cynical about the benefits of women's participating in organisations. The community directs many accusations at women who participate in SPI, calling them *pemberontak* (rebels), husband slayers, or women with no work, saying they are a disturbance to the community, members of GERWANI³² (*Gerakan Wanita Indonesia* or Indonesian Women's Movement), or are a bunch of criminals (CBO1;CBO2;CBO3, November 2001). This produces images of women who participate in SPI as 'bad women'. Women who participate in SPI are not only considered by the community as morally bad but also politically dangerous to the community. The discussion of members of SPI from diverse villages in Deli Serdang below illustrates the severe threat facing women who organise.

(Participant): *Village government and the community are yet to accept women organising. In our village one community organisation threatens us. We don't care as long as they don't bother our organisation.*

(Participant): *Local government invited youth organisations [to village meetings] but not us. We have not been accepted in our village.*

³² Members of GERWANI are considered by the New Order regime as women with bad morality. Further explanation on bad images of GERWANI will be discussed later.

(Participant): *People are yet to accept women to progress...they think if women become clever, they will become competitors to men. On the contrary, it's not like that.*

(Participant): *Perwiridan calls SPI husband slayer group... They said: 'if previously there was an anti narcotics movement, now there is SPI as husband slayer'. We are called husband slayers just because we want to progress.*

(Participant): *While previously, a mother's organisation was considered as GERWANI, now we [members of SPI] are considered as criminals. On the contrary, we care about our village and our head of village. I hope someday he will respond to our invitations. I think there is nothing wrong with women in this village being progressive/ developing.*

(Participant): *They [village government officials, male community organisations and perwiridan] were surprised [that women organised] ...that's why they responded negatively to us.*

(Participant): *In our village the head of village never asks anything about SPI even though we respect him. We come to him directly and invite him...we sent letters and other ways but still he did not come [to our events/activities].*

(Participant): *But he also did not prohibit us. Only there was an issue being spread within the community that if we gather and put our signature in our attendance list, it will be easier to catch us. They think we are GERWANI...although not always directly.*

(Participant): *In my village...may be because the head of village is my in-law, I don't know for sure...he does not have any comment, he just monitors us (CBO2, November 2001).*

Construction and reproduction of images of a 'good' and 'bad' woman by the community is one of the most effective instruments to threaten women from actively engaging in public affairs. Women were afraid to go out of their homes frequently because other people would say that they were prostitutes. This has made some women withdraw from participation in SPI.

The geographical and political condition of Deli Serdang which is surrounded by state owned plantations complicates the threats facing women in organising. In this area the structure of power is highly hierarchical with the power concentrated in the *mandor* (head of workers) or administrator. This power structure has not only isolated the community from the outside world, but also formed the community into a machine to

gain profits (Stoler 1985; Nirmawa et al.. 2002). Stoler (1985:210) more specifically argues:

North Sumatran agribusiness, in large part, [is] pivoted on the marginalisation of women at critical economic junctures...What is evident is that the stated policies have not only compounded the subordination of women but have ensured the political and economic vulnerability of the workforce as a whole.

The hierarchical structure of power inherited from Dutch colonialism is maintained and extended to include political control over the community. In the post colonial era, especially during the New Order era, these state owned plantation estates have increasingly been used as the vehicle to gain political support. Golkar³³ (Functional Party/ a name of a political party) always wins a majority of votes in state owned plantation estates. During the New Order era more than 90% of votes in plantation areas went to Golkar. It has been public knowledge that this political party used its power as a ruling party to control workers in the plantations to give their votes to this party.

While the male members of the plantation community have been politically controlled, women and other household members had to sublimate their political preferences to men as head of household (CBO2; NGO6, November 2001). By and large research participants point to the survival of their household as the reason to choose this political party. Although not explicitly described, they understand that there are sanctions such as not being given jobs, not being promoted, and moved to remote areas if they do not choose this political party. As a woman explains '*Golkar is the one who feeds us. If I did not choose Golkar, our cooking pot would roll away*' (describing the loss of a source of income) (CBO2, November 2001). Prior to entering the ballot box, husbands whispered or gave certain codes to their wives reminding them to choose Golkar. Women's groups were also frequently used to gain the votes. For example, prior to election meals were distributed to *perwiridan* members. On the shell of the boiled eggs which are included in the meals there were words such as *ingat* (remember) and *awas*

³³ Golkar was the ruling political party during the New Order regime.

(beware). Women understand that these words are both reminder and threat to choose this political party (CBO2; NGO2; NGO6; NGO10, November 2001). Thus, the structure of the plantation community has oppressed the workers in the community as a whole, but it has been more oppressive to women.

The use of the accusation of communism is another effective instrument of political control over women in Deli Serdang. Some areas in Deli Serdang used to be the bases of GERWANI (Nirmawa et al., 2002; CBO2; CBO3; CBO4, November 2001). Women who participate in SPI are accused of being GERWANI members. This accusation is threatening for women since the New Order regime produced and publicised a bad image of GERWANI as women's organisation which in its affiliation with PKI (Partai Komunis Indonesia or Indonesia's Communist Party) has been involved in much cruelty and immorality. PKI has been forbidden in Indonesia and many members of GERWANI were put in jail. According to Wieringa (1999:552-556) this has been a sexual slander which was put forward by the New Order regime on GERWANI, which was the most active women's organisation in Indonesia in defending women farmers' labourers rights and it was intended to topple down the Old regime and strengthen the domestication of women in Indonesia. According to some old women who were members of GERWANI in Deli Serdang this accusation is not true except that as members of GERWANI they frequently sang songs that encouraged women to progress (CBO4, November 2001). In pointing out the similarity of accusations directed at SPI, a leader of SPI contends:

When we filled the available time in the midst our discussion by singing songs to lift our spirits, they called us GERWANI. When we moved further forward and tried to participate more in villages events, we were given a new title ...husband slayers (SW, January 2003).

The accusation of SPI members as being GERWANI has been extensively used by village government officials and other members of the community including *perwiridan* to threaten women so that they will not dare to join SPI:

(Participant): Our village used to be the basis of GERWANI, so women are afraid to become involved in organisations. Women experience political trauma.

They [village government and some members of the community] terrorise us one by one

(Participant): *We are accused of being GERWANI. When I wore my SPI T-shirt on which was written 'Sisterhood among women', people said that I was a GERWANI. They said that the government will catch me and cut my throat. I was afraid. I hid the T-shirt* (CBO3, November 2001).

Some women were so afraid of this threat that they intended to burn the SPI T-shirt they bought. These severe impacts of being accused of being members of GERWANI do not only affect women but are extended to other members of the household threatening the survival of all members of the family. If a wife is accused of being involved with GERWANI, it will be very difficult for her husband and other members of the family to work in the plantation estate which is the main source of income for most areas in Deli Serdang. Thus, the accusation of being members of GERWANI has a threatening psychological, economic and political impact on women.

Women are not always allies

The patriarchal norms that restrict women's roles in the public sphere are not only upheld by men but are also internalised by women. In some cases women become the main source of threats to women who organise rather than their husbands. As one of the women who participates in SPI said *'My husband allows me to go to participate in group activities, but my neighbour likes to meddle in other people's business. My neighbour is a woman. She always asks why I go out frequently and creates bad gossip about me* (CBO3, November 2001).

Criticism is directed at members of SPI whether directly or covertly through gossip that degrades their existence as good women. Gossip and cynicism are among the main instruments used by women to preserve the patriarchal system that limits women's opportunities and capabilities for participating in local governance. Gossip from women outside SPI is based mainly on the perceived traditional gender roles of women. Women's performance is measured against their obedience in up holding the traditional patriarchal values. For other women who do not engage in SPI, participating in such an

organisation is a luxury since women in SPI frequently go away from home and out of the village which requires transportation. Thus, they are perceived as prioritising their self interest and organisations above the family interests:

(Participant): *'You frequently go out. This means you should have gained lots of money', my neighbour said to me.*

(Participant): *When I bargain for a 'tampa' (tray) for my feast, I asked to reduce the price from Rp12.000 to 4.000. Another woman who stood beside me said 'that's what happens if you just go to a hotel [for SPI meeting], you don't know the price anymore' [laughter].*

(Participant): *If we listened to that kind of neighbour, we would never be like this.*

(Participant): *'Certainly you have lots of money. Going out to the city requires public transportation which means you have to pay', my neighbour cynically said to me. I replied Alhamdulillah (thank God) I have lots of money.*

(Participant): *My neighbour who is a woman accused me of knowing nothing about housework anymore because I frequently go to a hotel to participate in my organisation. I got angry and told that woman that she should stop gossiping that I have lots of money. I asked her whether she would take responsibility for my safety because if somebody really thinks that I have lots of money, they will probably rob me.*

(Participant): *Women who go outside are perceived [by the community] as 'perempuan nakal' (bad women).*

(Participant): *If women organise people think we want to rebel.*

(Participant): *Women are afraid if they go out from their home people will say that they are prostitutes. They don't believe it when we tell them that we go out to enhance our knowledge.*

(Participant): *Just ignore the gossip. Later on it will be quiet. If we listen to them we'll never improve and we would never have joined this organisation (CBO2, November 2001)*

Although there are also other women's groups beside SPI in Deli Serdang such as *perwiridan* and PKK, the relationships between them have not always been good. Despite the overlapping membership, especially between SPI and PKK, these women's groupings are yet to cooperate with each other. Differences in approaches, focus and principles contribute to tensions among them. The main difference between SPI and the

other women's organisations lies in their position in relation to patriarchy. By PKK focusing merely on activities related to housework and other traditional women's obligations, and *perwiridan* accepting male bias interpretation on religion teaching, both PKK and *perwiridan* are perceived by women in SPI as strengthening patriarchal ideology in their activities and programs³⁴. Also according to women in SPI, *perwiridan* takes part in producing bad images of women who participate in SPI. Thus, it is difficult for SPI to build good relationships and to cooperate with *perwiridan* since members of *perwiridan* have been controlled by religious mythology which limits their way of thinking and subordinate women (CBO1; CBO2; CBO3; CBO4, November 2001). A leader of SPI explains this difficulty as follows:

(Researcher): *How is your relationship with perwiridan?*

(Participant): *We still can't penetrate them, because they still support and enhance religious teachings which perceive women as having a subordinate position to men. For example sharing [domestic] roles with husbands is considered as a sin. Some of us are members of perwiridan. We always take the opportunity to speak to the mubalig (person who has deep knowledge in Islamic teachings) about the relationship between men and women. According to some mubalig women are in equal position to men. We have a mission in perwiridan. For example, we discuss about polygamy. We do not agree if a husband re-married without his wife consent. In this case, if the wife is offended by her husband re-marries without asking her permission, then we consider the husband's attitude as violence against women. We discuss it among ourselves and with the mubalig so that it will become an open issue (CBO4, December 2001).*

Despite their tenuous relationship, SPI uses *perwiridan* as a strategic entry point to raise awareness among women and to slowly change understanding of religious teachings too, which can be very powerful. Women of SPI also take the opportunity to influence *perwiridan* members and motivate them to be concerned about their village government and to monitor government programmes, disseminate information about VRB (*Badan*

³⁴ This is the perception of SPI to *perwiridan* in their villages. Case study of *perwiridan* in *kelurahan* Melayu as described in Chapter Six demonstrates that women of *perwiridan* challenge patriarchy and participate in local governance. Thus, these differences should be looked upon the diversity of contextual social setting and women's agency rather than to assume that SPI is superior to *perwiridan*.

Perwakilan Desa or the Village Representative Body), and encourages *perwiridan* members to be involve in VRB. These activities are challenged by some members of *perwiridan*. A leader of SPI who is also a leader of *perwiridan* in her village explains the complexity in raising political awareness among members of *perwiridan* as follows:

We are also part of perwiridan. Some perwiridan members complain about why perwiridan discusses these kinds of issues. We have tried approaching women through perwiridan. It is tactical. As a leader I begin by giving them the opportunity to speak...to get the perwiridan members to open up...for courage. Since some of them sided with the head of village, they rejected my suggestion to ask for our head of village's accountability. The conflict started when I began sharing information about VRB. I told them that since there is VRB in our village women must learn and understand VRB. It is time for women to participate in VRB. Some of them reported me to the head of village (CBO7, December 2001).

While *perwiridan* is perceived as strengthening men's domination over women by accepting male biased interpretations of Islamic teachings, SPI perceives PKK as the extension of the hand of government whose programmes do not serve women's interests. PKK was considered as doing nothing to develop the village while it has received much assistance from local government (CBO3, November 2001): '*The problem with PKK is that it is only a name...only there when government needs it. It is difficult to meet the organiser of PKK*' (NGO, November 2001). Moreover, PKK is also used and exploited as in the case of a village in Deli Serdang where the head of village used the PKK money for his own interests (CBO1, November 2001).

Women of SPI sharply distinguish their organisation from PKK by frequently commenting that PKK is only about cooking and strengthening women's traditional domestic role, while SPI is an organisation for women to learn things and discuss issues that are relevant to their interests. According to SPI members, PKK through its programs strengthens the domestication of women (CBO2; CBO3, November 2001). A woman of SPI compares the benefits of participating in PKK and SPI as follows:

In this organisation [SPI] I make many new friends which widens my friendship with other people and gives me access to much information and knowledge. In PKK every time we met, the topic was just the same...women were asked to sew, make cakes...we have to spend our money for these programs (CBO7, December 2001).

Strategies of SPI: From Breaking the Silence to Influencing Policy Making

The following sections explore the multiple strategies women in SPI use in unravelling the interlocking of private and public patriarchy which have both been working against women in Deli Serdang. While there are diverse strategies SPI uses, consciousness raising and the strengthening of solidarity among women are fundamental to these strategies in addressing the complexity of challenges women face.

Breaking the silence

Considering that women have been muted for a long time by limitations and restrictions stemming from their culture, encouraging women to dare to speak is a critical step in empowering women in Deli Serdang. Breaking women's silence through encouraging women to speak is a basic philosophy and strategy of SPI. Women use their group discussions as the forum to encourage women to speak firstly among themselves. For these women, the ability and courage to introduce themselves (expressing their self-identity) to other members of the group by mentioning their name, speaking about their family and what village they come from are great accomplishments. As one woman notes:

For us, it is a success to be able to come here to gather and to speak. Introducing ourselves to people whom we have just met is a process of courage. We can talk loudly if we are by ourselves but if with people whom we have just met we only whisper (CBO4, November 2001).

Women need more courage to speak to other people outside their group. I noticed this difficulty in speaking to other people when I first met members of SPI to have a FGD with them at the SPI office. The leader of SPI opened this occasion by introducing me and the purpose of this FGD to the members. This was followed by each member taking

turns in introducing themselves, their names, family and which village they came from. While the leader and some of the members spoke in a relaxed and confident manner³⁵, some of the newer members spoke shyly and in soft voices, and their friends helped them to provide information about themselves. In further discussion I also noticed that some only gave short answers and some even just kept silent until I or their friends specifically asked them to speak (Field notes 22/10/2001).

SPI makes a use of every opportunity to encourage women to speak not only about their self-identity but also in expressing their responses to other people's opinions or statements. There was always time for discussions in SPI's activities that I attended. When I asked the leader of SPI why there were so many speeches delivered in their declaration of a federation, she told me that this is one way for women in SPI to learn to speak because they would ask the speaker questions and discuss these speeches in their gatherings (Field notes 1/11/2001). For these women, asking questions of speakers whom they consider as having more knowledge and a better position than them is a learning process and takes considerable courage. *'We talked about the speaker who is a [government] Minister on our way home in bus. Well, we know now that discussion even with a Minister is not terrifying. We can ask about anything'* (CBO1, November 2001).

In order to serve women's needs and interests SPI adjusts the time, design and topics of group discussions to women's conditions. Group discussions are mostly conducted at late afternoon after women fulfil their traditional domestic obligations and/or their activities in earning money. Due to the low education of the majority of SPI's members, group discussions are carried out in relaxed and non-threatening ways in which women sit together, or sometimes lie down on a mat, chat and avoid using paper and pens. The learning process through discussion groups is based mostly on memory: *'We even learn*

³⁵ I latter found that these were members who had been actively involve in SPI.

what SPI stands for. It took one day for women just to memorise Serikat Perempuan Independen. It's a slow process' (CBO4, November 2001).

The relevance of the topics discussed in SPI to women's daily experiences and needs prevents members of SPI from getting bored with their frequent discussions. SPI encourages women to bring up gender issues which previously have seldom been discussed in households, not to mention in public spaces. For example, domestic violence is considered by most members of SPI as an interesting issue because it frequently occurs and brings suffering to women but women do not know how to address this violence because the community has been reluctant to discuss it, feeling it is a secret and shameful topic. Women start to share their experiences in SPI and find ways to deal with domestic violence. *'In our organisation [SPI] we learn that we must and can defend ourselves if we are hit by our husband. It is not by hitting our husband back but by speaking to them'* (CBO7, November 2001). Thus, by creating a space for women to discuss this issue and attempt to find solutions, SPI significantly contributes to the strengthening of women in addressing domestic violence.

Group discussions change women's way of thinking in the way that they provide a supportive space in which women can think freely, analyse, and come to understand the roots of women's oppressions and find alternative ways of dealing with oppression. Through discussions women understand and see how the strong existence of patriarchal values in the society which place women in a subordinate position to men in families, communities and the state have prevented women from enjoying their rights as citizens and members of the community (CBO3; CBO4, November 2001). The significance of transformation in women's way of thinking in challenging patriarchy is explained by a leader of SPI as follows:

We ask them to think freely. Previously, women's thinking was limited to sumur, kasur, dapur. If we invite them to think freely, they will think first. That's why we agree to strengthen women on this issue first. Our focus is to encourage women to think freely. Women are invited to look around them for anything that has potential to destroy or raise their consciousness (CBO4, November 2004).

Analysing and using Islamic teachings and principles, women in SPI challenge and reformulate male biased interpretations of their religion that have been frequently used to oppress women. In their own narratives which also highlight women's resistance to misinterpretation of religion, women speak about their consciousness of their oppression:

We learn the Islamic religious principles. If we don't know we ask our leader. That's how it works. Is it an obligation for women to be beaten by her husband? Women used to be reluctant in telling other people about violence they experience. I asked a woman whose face is blue and black whether she was beaten by her husband, she said 'no'. I said to her that in our religion there is the right to sanction women, but it only suggests a separate bed for wife and husband, and to reduce the amount of money given to the wife. But it does not suggest that men can beat women. Finally this woman spoke. She told me that she refused to have sex with her husband because she was very tired. That's why her husband hit her. I told her that it is her right to refuse. There is a saying that women are a husband's field, it is up to men which part he intends to dig. This was the husband's justification of his violence as an answer to us, but we did not accept it. Now, none of our members are beaten by husbands. We told husbands that now we have a group so that husbands are afraid to beat their wives (CBO4, November 2004).

Rather than rejecting Islamic teaching, members of SPI strategically use this teaching to pursue their interests. Many of SPI members wear *jilbab* (Moslem women's dress). While in public places they always wear *jilbab*, but on some occasions, especially when members meet in informal gatherings, they unveil their *jilbab*. They said '*We are Moslem women. This is our way of dressing. This is our baju dinas* (official clothes)'. By following the Islamic teaching of how women should dress, members of SPI protect themselves from threats and they feel that this way of dressing will protect them from harm and help them to gain community acceptance of their involvement in SPI.

SPI provides women with the opportunity to learn new things. Some illiterate women learned to write in SPI. Other members of SPI taught them to write their name and signature on the attendance list which all members have to sign. They proudly describe their organisation as an organisation for women to learn. The enhancement of women's knowledge as a crucial strategy for village women in Deli Serdang is explained as follows:

Action is not the solution to women's problems. In order to be able to control village government we must know what we control. Now we are in the education stage...educating women on the function of village government. All the regulations, constitutions and formal educational materials are still too far from the people (NGO1, November 2001).

Women's enthusiasm in learning new things from the organisation is also evident in their invitation to me to come to their village to discuss about village government. They asked me to give them information about what village government is, the roles and obligations of government and the community, so they understood and could use this information to monitor village government (Field notes 3/11/2001). Although it was planting season when women were busy working in the fields, they spared some of their limited time because they wanted to learn about village governance issues. Information they gained from this discussion motivated them to extend their participation in village governance. A leader of SPI says:

We discussed information that you [the researcher] gave us about village government and PMD (Pemberdayaan Masyarakat Desa or Village Community Empowerment which is a section in local government) in our organisation. We decided that we should participate in the VRB (Badan Perwakilan Desa or village representative body) (CBO4, November 2001).

These women find activities in SPI exciting because through discussions and travelling outside of home it not only opens their horizons of thinking, but also expands their mobility and friendships. For these women entering a hotel and sitting in a seminar is a learning process since they had never previously put their foot in a hotel or attended formally structured meetings. Extending friendship with other people outside their group is a learning process for these women who are used to staying at home and at the same time enhances women's pride:

We feel proud to be able to make friends with lecturers...it is a learning process for us. We are village people, with a lack of education, not at the same level with the lecturers. It is an advantage for us if lecturers want to make friends with us. People coming and befriending us is a learning process for us. Some of our members wonder why these other women want to come and make friends with them (CBO4, November 2001).

On one occasion a member of SPI earnestly asked me if I was willing to have my photo taken with her since she wanted to show the photo to her husband who did not believe that she could make friend with a female university lecturer (Field notes 8/11/01).

Making friends with other people also provides psychological protection for these women. For example, when there was deep fear among SPI members who were threatened by village government officials to be caught and put in prison because of their participation in SPI, SPI invited academics to speak about their organisation. One of the female academics encouraged SPI members not to be afraid of the threat since women have the right to organise and it is guaranteed by the constitution. She told them that she would be the one to be caught if women who organised could be caught. This encouragement strengthened members of SPI. As a member of SPI remarks '*Now we are not afraid anymore. We just ignore what other people say. We do not know the exact chapter, but we know that the UUD (Undang Undang Dasar or constitution) guarantees freedom of expression and organisation*' (CBO3, November 2001).

Chilli sauce politics

In SPI women learn together and explore diverse strategies in dealing with patriarchy and poverty which have significantly obstructed women from participating in organisations. Fulfilling housework and other related traditional women's responsibilities is perceived by women as an effective means of achieving a more strategic goal, that is, participating in a women organisation's activities. Prior to going out, women firstly carry out their perceived domestic responsibilities, such as providing food, cleaning, and caring for the children. Since providing food for the family is very important, women learn from each other about efficient ways to cook food fast and prepare food that does not get rotten quickly (see Photo 3, page 230). Considering that many of the members of SPI also work to earn money, these women have to manage their time wisely in balancing their domestic and economic responsibilities by looking for support from other members of the household and/or by working harder in fulfilling these responsibilities. Support is often gained from other members of family: parents, children, neighbours and extended family, to enable women to fulfil these obligations.

(Researcher): *How then can you as women can participate in a women's organisation?*

(Participant): *... with our own consciousness.*

(Participant): *For me, I sell things at home, just waiting for buyers to come.*

(Participant): *I am a part time farmer. We have children who can help us. When I am told that there will be organisational activities, I wake up late at night and prepare everything related to housework [for the next day].*

(Participant): *I am a tailor. I work until late at night...it's economic problems that obstruct us. In our village, there are more poor people than those living with sufficient resources.*

(Participant): *If we want to go out, we finish housework first. Even though children can help, we should not burden them too much.*

(Participant): *My children never protest about my going out.*

(Participant): *I bring my 8 month old child to the meetings. I really want to know...My parents could only provide basic education for me. I did not even graduate from primary school. I asked my husband if I can join the organisation [SPI] to learn...he had no objection.*

(Participant): *Sometimes my mother or my mother in law will come to my house to take care of my children if I want to go to SPI.*

(Participant): *In our organisation we learn how to cook long lasting food...or even how to make the chilli sauce last longer. We try to find ways so that we can go out from home happily without neglecting our family (CBO3, November 2001).*

Making men allies of women is another effective strategy that is used by members of SPI in transforming gendered household relations. In her model of empowerment Rowlands (1997) argues for the inclusion of men as a critical component in empowering women. In many countries, including Indonesia, getting permission from husbands is crucial for women to be able to participate in activities outside their home. '*Persuading one's husband is both an obligation and a technique to get permission to join our organisation. It includes persuading one's husband to give opportunities for women to speak*' (CBO4, November 2001). Although most husbands allow their wife to attend religious and neighbourhood activities such as *perwiridan*, *arisan*, and *PKK*, it is very difficult for women to gain permission to participate in SPI. Therefore, women of SPI

share their experiences and teach each other diverse ways to persuade their husbands to give women permission to join and participate in SPI activities. Using their sexuality as women is one way to persuade their husband as suggested in the SPI rhyme earlier, '*We teach women how to persuade their husbands to let them participate in our organisation. At the first stage it does not matter if we have to seduce our husband to persuade him to accept our ideas*' (CBO4, November 2001). A leader of SPI further explains their strategy in persuading husband as follow:

(Researcher): *How do you persuade your husband?*

(Participant): *We prioritise our husband's interests. We ask our members who never beautify themselves to beautify themselves, to speak gently and gradually to their husband until he lets them go [to SPI meetings]. Up to now, none of the husbands were angry at us. But two husbands asked us 'Our wives told us that you teach them politics. What kind of politics?'. We replied 'It's not government politics but politics of how to manage the money husbands give so that it will be enough for one week. The politics of how to manage money and the household so that the Rp.10,000 our husbands give will be enough'. So their husbands accepted it. Actually we also discuss about VRB but we cannot usually explain it to the community. If the community has really understood us, then we'll tell them. Women share their experiences of how to come home from meetings without being scolded by their husbands. One way is to provide chilli sauce that can stand for quite sometime [and it still tastes good]. Men supported us when we taught this thing to their wives.*

(Researcher): *Doesn't this mean putting more burdens on women?*

(Participant): *It may be seem like that...because we have yet to manage our time wisely. But compare to the happiness we experience in meeting and in discussing issues with other women. We do not consider persuading our husband as difficult work.*

Thus, women's sexuality and the perceived traditional roles of women can be effectively used by women in dealing with the deeply rooted patriarchy within the household and the community. With their success in gaining their husband's permission, women use this opportunity to expand their activities by joining organisations which focus on women's empowerment and even participating in activities with other civil society movements.

Another strategy that women use to influence their husbands is to inform them about topics they discuss in their meetings, interesting experiences and people they meet by participating in SPI, and the benefits of their activities outside home to their family. Some women even ask their husbands to accompany them and attend their activities. Although some husbands reject the idea of participating in SPI activities, women who succeed in persuading their husband to attend their activities describe, how by involving husbands in their activities they gain their husband's support:

(Participant): *My husband came with me to the hotel where we held our activity, but he stayed outside because he was shy.*

(Participant): *My husband is happy when my friends from SPI visit us. He feels proud and wonders why people visit us because even our family may not visit us for 5 years. If I do not provide food for our guest, he asks me "Why did not you prepare food for the guest?" I said I can't, I have to participate in the discussion. "So why you just listen?" Well, that's part of my lesson, I answered. So my husband cooks something for us, but he is too shy to join us and he is also afraid that he will disturb us.*

(Participant): *...if I did not go [to a meeting] then my husband would ask me why I did not go*

(Participant): *If we come [to her house], her husband will be angry if she does not prepare food for us. That's why if we come to her house we bring along two men to cook (CBO1, November 2001).*

Discussions on gender and political voice frequently discuss the reluctance of women to speak in the midst of men. Little attention has been given to men's feelings when they are the minority in women's gatherings. The above FGD shows that men also feel uncomfortable if they are in minority numbers in the women's group. Understanding the urgency in addressing this feeling of discomfort in order to gain men's support, SPI uses other male NGO members to involve men. While women discuss their issues in a room, male members of a NGO make friends and chat with husbands about SPI and the benefits of women participating in this organisation. Husbands become proud when they see their wives lead discussions (CBO3, November 2001). The pride other members of the household gain from having women participate in SPI contributes to their support of women.



Photo 3: Women finding strategies to alleviate domestic burdens and thus give them free time to organise: an example of 'chilli sauce politics'

Support from husbands is very important for these women. In some cases women do not dare to join SPI or withdraw from this organisation because their husband is not supportive. Some husbands strengthen the community's negative perception of women who organise by threatening their wives that they will be caught by the police, or stating that organisations like SPI are only for well educated and rich women or that it is useless for women to participate in SPI. In cases where husbands deny permission to women to attend SPI meetings, women will look for other support from the extended family such as parents, parents in-law, and their children. A woman recalls:

At first my husband did not allow me to join the organisation [SPI]. He said 'What for? I am the one who feeds you'. My mother in law also did not agree. She said 'If a woman becomes clever she will oppress her husband'. I told my parents my intention and reasons to participate in SPI. My parents supported me and persuaded my husband to let me join the organisation because I needed to learn and to develop myself. Finally my husband allowed me to become a member of SPI (CBO2, November 2001).

Thus, establishing alliances with other members of the household or extended family is strategic since it strengthens women's position in dealing with the gendered household relations.

Theatre

SPI uses theatre as an instrument for women to actualize themselves. Awareness raising and women's empowerment through analyzing factors that have contributed to women's marginalisation is not only conducted through discussions and trainings. This is obvious from the preparation of the SPI theatrical performance for the declaration of the formation of the SPI Sumatra Utara which I attended and which took place at the office of SPI (Field notes 4/11/01). All members sat together on a mat, discussed and determined the theme and story's plot for their theatre performance. SPI invited a male who has formal education and knowledge of theatre to facilitate their discussion. While the male facilitator explained the theatrical aspect of the topic they chose and how important it was for the theatre to have key words that can be used to educate and empower women, members of SPI determined the topic, scenario and actors. Thus, all the women became the directors in this theatre. Roles and actors were discussed and negotiated. They laughed, criticised, explained, and made suggestion to each other until they agreed on who would be the actors and what roles they would play. Women decided that forced marriage and women's strategies in dealing with this issue would be the topic of their performance. Women have the capability to critically analyse and justify their argument. For example, when discussing the path to Dewi's success (the main actress), women chose entrepreneurship (which combines creativity and intelligence) rather than working as an employee in a company (which prioritises formal education). The essence of the scenario was a critique of patriarchy. Through discussion they agreed that women, men and the state have been oppressive to women. Another topic that emerged in this discussion was that the society and culture have been discriminated against women by perceiving that it is shameful for a woman if her younger sister or brother gets married earlier. On the other hand, it is normal for men to have late marriage. Through discussions in preparing for the theatre performance these

women have successfully analysed the intertwining of domestic, community and state patriarchy in oppressing women.

Theatre is more than merely an art performance since it serves empowerment roles. Internally, it can raise awareness among women through their preparatory discussions in which they identify and analyze the sources of oppression to women in their village, suggest alternative solutions to their problems, and make decisions democratically. By performing in theatre, women open alternative spaces for women other than their daily domestic environment. It teaches and encourages women to enter and speak in public spaces and enhances their self confidence in entering public domains. Externally, theatre is used to raise consciousness among community and family members. Members are encouraged to bring their husbands to their performance. A husband may see that his wife is not the only woman who is involved in the performance and they are proud to see their wife perform. They also may learn about and understand problems women face from the story line of the theatre. Theatre is another subtle but effective way to raise consciousness among men without creating severe conflict and confrontation.

Congress

While networking with civil society is a way of consolidating power externally, the Congress of SPI, which is conducted annually, is also a significant instrument to encourage women to speak in formal situations while at the same time consolidating power internally. Congress is an event through which members of SPI from diverse villages in Deli Serdang meet formally to discuss and make decisions related to their organisational growth. The first Congress of Serikat Perempuan Merdeka Sumatra Utara was held from 8-9 November 2001 at Balai Benih Murni Lubuk Pakam. In this Congress members of SPI from diverse village in Deli Serdang, Labuhan Batu, Simalungun, Langkat and other women's NGOs such as Komunitas Serikat Perempuan

Deli Serdang and Perserikatan OWA Palembang met to discuss the development of their organisations.³⁶

Congress' benefits extend to improving women's skills in organising and in enhancing solidarity among women from diverse villages and regencies. Each time they meet, SPI members hug each other warmly and they seem so happy to meet one another. They shared their feelings and experiences as they relaxed in their bedrooms where they were staying (Field notes 8/11/2001).

While discussions in SPI are usually conducted informally, in this Congress members of SPI were introduced to the formality of an organisation's meeting, including Congress ethics, in which they learned to listen and to speak while being appreciated by others (see Photo 4, page 235). The Congress was structured formally, opened with speeches, and followed by group discussions and general meeting. Prior to the general meeting, group discussions were conducted with women divided into several groups. The Congress worked in an orderly manner since women obeyed the rules. For example, they had to raise their hands and stand if they wanted to interrupt (ask questions). They clapped their hands each time they finished a session (Field notes 9/11/2001). Thus, attending Congress is both a great experience for these women and enhances women's skills in organising and other related skills relevant to improving their organisation.

While women seem to easily adjust to formal rules and the way they sit on chairs at a table with a microphone, some women found the technical and formal words used, as well as material discussed in the Congress, were very difficult to understand. Difficult terms included, organisation structure, *dewan eksekutif federasi* (the executive body of the federation), divisions, quorum, voting, *Ornop/LSM* (*Organisasi non Pemerintah/Lembaga Swadaya Masyarakat* or NGO). A woman told me: 'The terms

³⁶ The other two non-SPI organisations, which have networks with SPI, were invited to the Congress since this Congress discussed the possibility of the formation of a women's federation.

are too advanced. They are only for those with education. I have a headache thinking about and listening to this' (Field notes, 9/11/2001). This difficulty became more obvious when they were asked to give their opinions and suggestions for the planning for yearly programs even though HAPSARI provided the program planning matrix.

There seems to be disagreement between NGOs and SPI, as a community based organisation, in facing this problem. When an NGO activist told a member of SPI, who led the discussion, to use time efficiently by not explaining the words since she assumed that these women knew them, the leader of SPI protested:

'No, I can't do that because these women do not understand these words. I have to explain some unfamiliar words into simple daily language. For example, in explaining words such as control and monitor, I should provide an example of a person giving sign and show the direction to follow. When people came from outside and talked to them, sometimes these women do not understand. They just nod their heads while actually they do not understand' (CBO4, November 2001).

Understanding village women's low level of formal education, the SPI leader who led the discussion tried to explain the above terms in simple language and sometimes translated them into Javanese language since the majority of the members understood Javanese.

In this Congress women gained political experience by learning how to solve differences and make decisions democratically. For example, when members perceived that they were being forced into making a decision on whether to include or delete the name of HAPSARI from the Federation which was to be formed, they protested and asked for a vote to be cast. Prior to voting, leaders of different opinion groups approached Congress' participants and lobbied them to gain support for their opinion on the name of the federation. Although there were some disagreements, women settled their differences democratically and determined HAPSARI, Federasi Serikat Perempuan Merdeka Sumatra Utara (HAPSARI, Federation of North Sumatra's Independent

Women/ HAPSARI, FSPM)³⁷ as the name for the federation. The name of HAPSARI was included based more on consideration in securing networks with other funding NGOs and avoiding difficulties and confusion with some programs which were still in progress. This choice reflects dependency of SPI on HAPSARI. As a leader of SPI argues *'Independence is important but the women are not ready yet. We are yet to be able to establish networks with other NGOs'* (CBO4, November 2001). They shook hands and laughed together.



Photo 4 The Congress of FSPM North Sumatra: Women learn the formality of organisation's meeting and decision making

The Congress which was intended to be held for three days (8-10 November 2001) finished in two day. Social critiques in the form of songs and poems were sung and recited during the Congress. This Congress was closed with women singing a song that they adapted from a song for Indonesia's independence: *'Cheer, cheer up! All cheer up.*

³⁷ From this point onward I will use HAPSARI,FSPM to refer to the Federation of HAPSARI

Our country has been independent. Women are free to gain happiness. That's our goal for ever and ever'. Despite the perceived domesticity of women and their unfamiliarity with and limited knowledge of formal public activities, this Congress reveals that women have the capability to conduct public activities effectively and democratically.

The 2001 November Congress of SPI resulted in the formation of the HAPSARI, FSPM which was merely an umbrella through which diverse women's groups in North Sumatra work together, was aimed at enhancing both organisational and political effectiveness of women's movement in influencing policy making in North Sumatra. It was a response to the growth of women's organisations in the way it produces more women as leaders, since each *kabupaten* (regency) would become an independent unit which has their own leader. Thus, there would be 21 women as leaders compared to the seven organisers when SPI Sumatra Utara was still a union with 523 members.

Moreover, the establishment of a Federation aims at increasing independence of each individual SPI group in the villages and regencies in terms of finances and decision making. Women perceive the formation of the federation resembles the recent decentralisation in Indonesia which gives greater autonomy to regional and local governments. The formation of HAPSARI, FSPM is a shift from a hierarchical system of women's organisation to the devolution of power. In this framework, women's groups at the grassroots as members of the federation have greater power to make their own decisions and to progress. By becoming a federation it is hoped that SPI will be more sensitive and responsive to the diversity of women in North Sumatra (CBO3, November 2001).

Consolidation of power among women's groups is critical in scaling up and enhancing women's effectiveness in influencing public decision making. Influencing policy making through direct control at the local government level is an immediate goal of the federation. In the long term HAPSARI, FSPM aims at establishing a political party which will represent women's interests. Thus the formation of HAPSARI, FSPM is

obviously political since it provides construction for women's voices to be heard and considered more by policymakers.

Advocacy for women through education remains the main focus of HAPSARI, FSPM. HAPSARI, FSPM perceives advocacy as the strengthening of women which includes activities starting from organising women's groups up to transforming policy changes for economic enhancement of women (Nirwana et al., 2002). Advocacy should start by raising women's consciousness as those who have been marginalised. The evolution of advocacy in the women's movement in Deli Serdang can be described as follows:

-During HAPSARI, it was aimed at strengthening women in villages through activities such as: teaching women and children to read and write, socialization of women's rights through radio and bulletins, formation of independent women's groups and organisations and theatre groups as actualisation instruments for women at the grassroots.

-During SPI, the advocacy was aimed at strengthening women in the villages and the production of policies especially the *Peraturan daerah* (regional regulation) for economic betterment of women as members of SPI as well as women in North Sumatra in general. Beneficiaries of this advocacy are extended to the community. The extension was conducted through increasing members and expanding regions for membership. Advocacy was also results oriented, for example, conducting advocacy and strengthening women's economy.

-Federation is the continuation of the previous advocacy by aiming directly at the issuance of *Peraturan daerah* for the enhancement of the economic condition of women (Nirwana et al., 2002).

Thus, the strategy for advocacy of the women's movement in Deli Serdang gradually evolves from breaking women's silence to influencing policy making. The framework for the advocacy is civil and political rights which are then developed into economic rights. Differing from other civil society movements, such as farmers and labourers which use the handling of cases in their advocacy, this women's group uses education

as their advocacy paradigm. Despite the evolution of advocacy, the focus remains the same - that is the strengthening of women in villages.

Interestingly, creation of HAPSARI-FSPM brings a new gender perspective that is the inclusion of men in women's empowerment by opening the opportunity for male organisations to join this federation. The requirement for male organisations to be accepted as members is that they should have minimum of 20 members and they should not be a foundation or NGO. HAPSARI and SPI have long established relationships with men's organisations.

Networking with Civil Society

SPI expanded its activities and found room to manoeuvre in civil society movement by becoming a member of JOIPARA (*Jaringan Organisasi Independen Pembela Rakyat* or Network of Independent Organisations of the Defender of the People) which consists of various sectoral mass organisations in Deli Serdang such as plantation workers, fishers, farmers and labourers. As a member of JOIPARA, SPI actively collaborates with other civil society organisations in monitoring corruption, having meetings with DPRD (Regional House of Representatives), putting demands on government, and other issues of social and political injustices. SPI perceives that it is important to collaborate with other civil society organisations since injustices have to be dealt with comprehensively because they significantly contribute to women's suffering and oppression. As a member of SPI explains:

We participate in demonstrations by plantation workers because our husbands are plantation workers. If husbands are threatened, the life of the household will be threatened. If husbands are unemployed, then we have to work harder to support our family, not to mention the violence that may emerge due to husbands' depression (CBO2, November 2001).

Thus, participating in civil society movements is crucial to the effectiveness of SPI in struggling for women's empowerment.

SPI and JOIPARA participate and help each other in their activities and programs. Members of JOIPARA participate in most of SPI's big events such as congresses, seminars, training and advocacy meetings (see Photo 5, page 240). While members of JOIPARA are actively involved in discussions and seminars conducted by SPI, they do not speak in discussions which are related to internal organisational issues of SPI. In the first Congress of SPI Sumatra Utara members of JOIPARA and other male NGOs participated in ensuring that this event was run well by arranging technical instruments, food and security, and typing up the discussions on the computer (Field notes 9/11/2001). According to these men they participate in women's organisation activities because they sympathise with women's organisations and want to know more about the women's movement (NGO6, November 2001).

Both SPI and other civil society organisations benefit from their alliance. Attending the women's group activities and meetings is important in raising consciousness and gender sensitivity among male NGOs. As a leader of one NGO noted:

Men in JOIPARA learn a lot from women. We admire women's will to study amidst their limited time. Sometimes they even have to leave their husbands to study. Although women have not graduated from elementary school they have the capability to move and progress (NGO10, November 2001).

The participation of SPI as a women's organisation enriches the existence of civil society movements in Deli Serdang. JOIPARA always invites SPI especially in discussing gender issues so that women's interests will be understood and represented in civil society movements (NGO10, November 2001).

However, the relationship between SPI and civil society organisations has not always been easy. Despite women's active participation in civil society movements, there are tendencies to neglect women's interests and other related gender issues. Civil society has placed women's interests under the umbrella of community interests as can be seen from the demands brought up in their actions. SPI has to struggle hard to avoid cooptation by male NGOs so that gender issues will not disappear in civil society movements. The difficulty in developing networks with male NGOs while at the same time avoiding cooptation is explained as follows:

We reject the dichotomy of male and female in organising people's movements, but we must also be very careful that women's interests will not disappear. Should we be just a bit neglectful, then women's interests will be by passed. We haven't found a form that we may agree upon. In labourers' movements, laborers' issues are addressed in general while there are women laborers. They think that if farmers have achieved welfare then women have already been included in it. Female farmers' organisations were only formed after criticisms by women. In celebrating the national day of farmers, gender issues were not seen in activities and statements of demand. 'Don't speak about gender. If we discuss about democracy, all has been included...Human rights are universal' they say (NGO1, November 2001).



Photo 5: The Congress of FSPM, North Sumatra which gave birth to the HAPSARI, FSPM: Extending networks and building alliances with men

Another form of women's marginalisation in civil society movements occurs when women participate in civil society joint actions without really understanding what they are fighting for. A member of SPI described her feelings in participating in a demonstration with other civil society organisations in front of the DPRD (Regional House of Representative) Medan:

We were invited by the (university) students to...I don't know, but the core is to overthrow Golkar...Akbar Tanjung, bring Soeharto cronies to justice and such.

Then we participated in the burning of the flag in front of the TVRI (state owned television station). They asked for our participation. For women this is a learning process...we have never done it before. The women marched in a disciplined manner, watching and feeling afraid. We were told what the demonstration was for but some did not understand. 'What does it mean...why is Golkar being criticised...it used to be owned by the plantation people and the government, why did they burn its flag? Will they not attack us back?' (CBO1, November 2001).

The marginalisation of women in civil society movements may even take the form of the exploitation of women. In another region outside but close to Deli Serdang, an NGO invited women to participate in a demonstration to reclaim land from the government. These women, some of whom brought their children with them, had to stay eight nights in a government building and sleep on mats. The role of women in this action was explained by a leader of an NGO as follows:

We need women in land occupations, in land reclamation...it's urgent...if we stand in front then there will be physical conflict with the military forces. If women stand in front they will be reluctant to have conflicts with women. Women are not afraid of the military (NGO7, November 2001).

Despite women's contribution they were not involved in decision making and negotiation with local government since that NGO considered that women's low education and difficulty in using proper *bahasa* Indonesia would only obstruct the fulfilment of this NGO's interests in its negotiations with government (NGO7, November 2001).

Thus, civil society movements have not always been empowering to women. By perceiving human rights concepts as gender neutral, civil society contributes to the disappearance of women's interests. This neglect of women's interests in civil society movements is also admitted by male organisations as follows:

Women's interests are yet to emerge in civil society's demonstrations and activities. Even though there are actions that are conducted together in which male and females participate, yet, the issues emerging in these activities are general. They are yet to be gender specific, in terms of the inclusion of women's interests specifically (NGO10, November 2001).

The deeply rooted patriarchy in government institutions complicates the emergence of gender issues in civil society movements. For example, in discussion meetings about

labourers in Deli Serdang with the members of the house of representative, which was also attended by SPI, both SPI and JOIPARA proposed the inclusion of gender issues in the regulations. Members of the house of representatives rejected this suggestion by arguing that government regulations do not have to mention the rights of women as labourers explicitly since they have been covered in labour rights in general (NGO10, November 2001).

Women's self identification and pride as SPI members serve as instruments in avoiding cooptation and instrumentalisation of women in civil society movements. For example, members of SPI criticised the student who organized and invited them to participate in this demonstration but could not even state the name of their organisation correctly. They protested, demanding that the name of their organisation which was not mentioned in that demonstration was called out (CBO3, November 2001).

Benefits of Organising: Personal and Collective Empowerment

Empowerment through awareness-building and organizing women has been pointed out as an ideal model for women's empowerment (Rowlands, 1997:24). While previous sections have discussed the multiple strategies SPI uses in empowering women in Deli Serdang, the following sections highlight the diverse forms of empowerment resulting from the work of SPI. I will argue that there are many kinds of empowerment and definitions and forms of empowerment should be determined by women themselves by relating them to the contextual setting in which women live in, their experiences, constraints and the way women respond to and reconstruct the existing structures. A key question considered in this section is, does personal empowerment always contribute to collective empowerment and if so, how?

Personal Empowerment

Participating in organisations contributes to women's self-empowerment in the way that it raises the consciousness and self-confidence of women. The ability to speak out at the meetings and the courage to ask permission from their husbands to participate in SPI are

among the most frequent signs cited by women to define personal empowerment. Women in SPI point to their ability to overcome and free themselves from *takut* (fear) and dependence on their husbands, the community and everything outside their home environment and the ability to expand their mobility as evidence of personal empowerment. Enhanced mobility by travelling and staying overnight away from their home and village is a great achievement for these women considering the strict gendered roles that have been ascribed to them as women. In their own narratives members of SPI explain both the personal fulfilment and empowerment they achieve through their participation in SPI as follows:

(Researcher): *What is the benefit to you in joining SPI?*

(Participant): *I used to be very afraid that my husband would leave me...I cried a lot. But now I have many friends here to support and strengthen me. Now I am not afraid anymore.*

(Participant): *I have gained many experiences. Previously I did not dare go to Medan alone...now I have the courage to go there even though I do not know for sure which transportation I should take.*

(Participant): *Now I even dare to sleep overnight at Tandis [a village in Deli Serdang] [laughter]*

(Participant): *After joining SPI, we are not afraid of our surroundings anymore...we realize we do not know much and have been left far behind.*

(Participant): *Even my husband has never slept in a hotel.*

(Participant): *They have air conditioning in hotels, I would never experience this if I did not join the organisation. I used to be afraid of everything...not anymore. I was afraid that somebody would scold me if I did something wrong...not anymore*

(Participant): *A funny thing happened when we slept over at the hotel. The telephone rung, everybody ran to get the phone [laughter]. Well, that's our experience as village people, we had never heard a telephone ring before.*

(Researcher): *Haven't you used telephone before?*

(Participant): *How could we? Our place used to be only at home, in the dry fields, and home...that's all.*

(Participant): *We shouted loudly when we wanted to call our friends in another room. Then we were told that there is a bell that can be used to call just by*

pressing it if we want to call our friends in other rooms, thus, we do not need to shout loudly [laughter].

(Participant): *After the Congress, we told our exciting experiences to other women in our place...hopefully they will be interested in joining our organisation.*

(Participant): *If you participate in an organisation it is easy to meet the President and Khofifah [the name of the previous Minister for Women's Empowerment] (CBO1, November 2001).*

This FGD suggests knowledge and experiences they gained from participating in SPI contributed significantly to women's self-confidence and the ability to re-define gender relationships in the household. Knowledge they gained from SPI enhances their negotiation of power with their husbands. It enhances women's independence and self-confidence in making decisions about their lives. As a woman recounts:

I was offended by my husband's habit of re-marrying several times. My husband said in a cynical way that women become clever when they get organised. I replied to him that even though women are clever, men still cheat on women, like he did to me. Participation in an organisation teaches us to dare to speak about our rights. I asked for a divorce, but he apologized. I will still attend and participate in SPI activities, even if he prohibits me to (CBO3, November 2001).

Personal empowerment for these women should not be put in contradiction with men, rather it should be aimed at transforming gendered household relations into more equal and harmonious gender relationship. As a woman comments: *'We learn not to overpower men but to look for the balance in negotiation of power between husbands and wives'* (CBO4, November 2001). The ideal gender relations at the household is when members of the household respect and recognise the contribution of each other to their household. Through their participation in SPI women understand that they have contributed much to the survival of their households. According to these women their participation in SPI enhances their ability to contribute more to the household. They contend:

(Participant): *Gender relations should be about [men and women] mutually respecting each other. I don't mind that my husband doesn't have paid work [unemployed]. I will not undermine him if he stays at home doing the cooking and washing. On the other hand, I want him to appreciate the housework I do.*

(Participant): Won't your husband be considered as being under his wife's armpit?... [laughter].

(Participant): We are not like that. The perwiridan members accuse us of being husband slayers, because they do not know that we learn to help our husbands. For example, if our husband is dealing with police, in most cases the wife will not dare to speak...they just cry. This means that we put more burdens on our husbands. Well, at least now we can speak out and ask for explanations from the police (CBO1, November 2001).

Along with their increasing self confidence and awareness, women start to reconstruct gendered household relations. Personal empowerment starts from changing interactions and more equal relations among the family members. This can be seen through women's ability to successfully negotiate and make their family members understand why it is important for them to join an organisation and support them. Women are not only able to get their husband's permission to join the organisation but in some cases they have been able to transform their husbands and other members of their household to become their allies, as the following illustrates:

(Participant): Days before I go out I have asked my husband's permission [in the past]. Now my husband is the one who reminds me to prepare myself if I have to go out.

(Participant): I have low blood pressure...used to have headaches. My husband bought the medicine for me so that I can go to the meetings. Now, he does not prohibit me to go.

(Participant): My husband gave me money to buy clothes so that I have appropriate dress when I attend the meetings. He would be angry if I did not buy the clothes.

(Participant): As for me...my children told me that when they grow up, they want to be like me.

(Participant): My grown up son said...'if our mother has to go to her organisation's activities we have to help her so that everything will be OK' (CBO3, November 2001).

In some cases women's personal empowerment transcends to benefit her husband and other members of the family. By participating in organisations women enhance their husband's position in the community. For example, a husband whose wife is a leader in

an organisation was asked to sit in front at community meetings when previously this has never happened to him (CBO2, November 2001).

Support from other members of SPI enhances women's self confidence to further their involvement in community affairs. The case of a woman in a village in Deli Serdang who reluctantly rejected her election to become a secretary for the parent-teacher meetings at school because she has difficulty in writing, highlights the significance of support through sharing of knowledge among members of SPI. It was only after other members of SPI promised to teach her how to write and to support her in fulfilling her duties that this woman willingly took that position. Other members have contributed to this woman's personal empowerment. The appointment of one of the members of SPI for the above position which previously has always been dominated by men is considered by other members of SPI as a great achievement for SPI as a group (CBO3, November 2001).

Some women extend personal empowerment they gain by participating in SPI to include encouraging other women to join SPI. Strongly motivated by their intention to attract new members by visiting them personally, two women of SPI willingly travelled by foot for 14 kilometres (which took 4.5 hours) since it is difficult to get public transportation which goes to these prospective members' village. Although some of the truck drivers who passed them by offered them a lift, they rejected the offer because they were aware of the possibility of sexual harassment (which they heard could happen). They repeatedly stressed how happy and proud they were that women in this village accepted them. They stayed at one woman's house who then invited other women to come and chat with women from SPI (CBO4, November 2001)³⁸. This personal approach has been effective in recruiting women as new members.

³⁸ Usually it takes more than several visits to find a village woman who willingly serves as a contact person in that village. This woman then invites other women in her village to come to discussions with SPI. When more women join the discussion, then the formation of SPI group in that village is proposed.

The following two cases case studies which are based on women's narratives illustrates in more detail how women experience changes through their participation in SPI and how they use these changes to transform gendered relations in the household and community.

Case 1: Siti Juripah³⁹

Siti Juripah, a woman from one of the villages in Deli Serdang, was the first member of SPI that was introduced to me by the leader of HAPSARI. She speaks confidently and wears *jilbab* (a veil). After graduating from SPG (which is equivalent to high school), she got married to a truck driver and had 5 children. She told me that actually she wanted to further her study at the university but her husband did not have enough money. She gave birth to three children and the other two are her step children from her husband's previous marriage. As the wife of a truck driver, who frequently had to go outside the village and does not come home for several days, she spent her time as a fulltime housewife. She seldom went out of her home to socialise with other people. Her husband only allowed her to participate in *perwiridan* and *arisan*, but she could not go far from her house and family.

She first heard about SPI from friends who invited her to SPI because this organisation provides education for women. These friends also told her that by participating in SPI, she could have many friends everywhere. Out of curiosity and boredom of just staying at home, she asked for her husband's permission to accept the invitation. She told her husband whatever she learned from the organisation. At first her husband did not pay attention to her involvement in SPI. She found discussions in SPI interesting and unique since they discussed domestic violence. Usually people do not talk about domestic violence because it is considered as family's and community's shame. She told him that in the organisation they were being educated to enable them to become the head of village. '*Our organisation gives women education, while government does not*' she told her husband. She also told her husband that they had meetings with local government officials. They had never experienced this before. At first her husband neither believed nor interested in her stories. Later her husband said '*why do you learn as if you want to build a country?*' She attended a speech competition in Medan and came out as the winner. This prestige made her husband proud and he permitted her to go further to Jakarta.

Learning from SPI about domestic violence, she realised that she had been violent to her step children by being cruel to them. She felt guilty since the organisation teaches her to

³⁹ This is a pseudonym.

act against violence, thus, she realised she should treat her children fairly. She began by confessing to her husband that she had done wrong to her step children. She also apologized directly to the children. Gradually she started to speak and build a closer relationship with them. Her closeness with her step children made her husband realise the benefit of her joining SPI. Participating in SPI not only changed her attitude but also transformed relationships within their household. She told her husband that child care should not only be the mother's responsibility and that everything in the household should be discussed by both husband and wife. Although it took quite a while, eventually, at least once a week when her husband was at home, he would help with cooking which he had never done before.

Her ability to solve family problems enhanced her credibility in the eyes of her extended family of the benefits of participating in SPI. She pointed out a case where she defended her family against the family of her cousin's husband who demanded their rights over her cousin even though her husband had left her unsupported for 3 years. Her family was scared because they thought they were powerless in facing these rich people who came by car and have cell phones. Being so afraid, her family could not answer and suggested to her cousin that it was better for her to join her husband even though her cousin had rejected this idea. The organisation taught her to have the courage to speak to anybody. She sat among her family and tried to speak about women's rights. Her family was there and they listened. Participating in the speech competition and in theatre in SPI contributed to her courage in speaking up to defend her cousin's rights. She asked her cousin's in-laws *'how can you say that you have the right over my cousin after you left her without any kind of material and psychological support for 3 years? In marriage law this can be considered as a divorce'*. They could not answer and left the house without putting any demands to her cousin anymore. By solving her family's problem, her family realised that her participation in SPI was beneficial, and finally they all supported her. Her children's grandmother is not reluctant to take care of her children when she attends SPI's activities because she knows that her participation has been beneficial to their family.

Siti Juripah is involved deeply in SPI. After one year in SPI, she was chosen as leader of SPI Bingkat. Her self esteem and self confidence improved. She entered public activities and forums. Although at first it was strange for her, she started to participate in men's discussions, especially regarding community issues, in public places. Men looked at her strangely and sometimes they gossiped about her, although not directly. She now does her best and takes every opportunity to attend community meetings even though she has never been invited formally since the village government usually invites heads of the household, which are perceived as male. She encourages other women to attend the meetings since their husbands are invited. At the formation of HAPSARI, FSPM, she was chosen as secretary which also means she is not a leader of SPI in her village anymore. Recently she has been chosen as a member of VRB in her village.

She has been frequently questioned and suspected by village government and youth organisation regarding her activity in taking women out of their village to learn and stay overnight away from their home. Along with her increasing involvement in

addressing community and village government issues, gossip directed at her became more severe. The head of village perceived her as his ambitious competitor in head of village election.

Case 2: Sarinem⁴⁰

Sarinem is also a housewife and a high school graduate. She does not wear *jilbab* and she speaks confidently. She told me that before joining SPI she used to feel inferior to her friends who furthered their study at university. *'But not anymore'* she said *'although they have a certificate, they do not put it in practice so that they may contribute to the community. They just hang their certificate on the wall'*.

Besides being a leader of SPI, she is also the leader of *perwiridan* in her village. Prior to joining SPI she was involved in PKK for 2 years and Pembantu Pelayanan Desa (PPD or village service assistant). Although she considered her involvement in these activities had not been beneficial compared to her involvement in SPI, being involved in these activities she knew that much corruption had occurred and that she became familiar with the people and processes in village government. Describing her gratitude to SPI which has given her knowledge and new experiences, she remarked *'I cannot imagine what I would be like if I did not participate in SPI. I cannot repay what SPI has given me'*. Through SPI she realised and told her husband that child care is not only women's responsibility. However, she also asked me not to perceive this as a rebellion against the husband. When she showed her husband her photo with the Minister of Women's Empowerment, he was so proud of his wife that he hung this photo on the wall. At the same time her husband also has warned her not to get involved deeply in political activities in their village. But she insisted that it is her life, her father and father-in-law support her.

She proudly considered herself as a *Soekarnoist* (follower of Soekarno, the first President of Indonesia) and confidently expressed her political affiliation to PDI (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia or Indonesia Democratic Party). *'I chose PDI. I did not choose Golkar because I hate their way of thinking, their characters'*. Although she perceived herself as tending to be like Megawati (the present Indonesian President), she is still not certain whether with her position as President, Megawati represents women's interests. *'Up to now we have looked up to Megawati because she is a woman. We have to wait and see how much she can do for women'* she said.

She encouraged women to join SPI by inviting and giving them books and materials to read. At the same time she actively monitors village governance. She exposed corruption by the head of village in her village in using JPS (*Jaring Pengaman Sosial* or social safety network) money. In the newspaper the head of village publicised that the

⁴⁰ This is a pseudonym.

JPS money was used to build a bridge and the rest to help small entrepreneurs. Through her networks in SPI she knew that only 30% of the cost for the bridge came from the JPS money while the rest was the community's contribution. She also checked directly by talking with the small entrepreneurs who had been described as receiving the JPS money. Then she went to *kecamatan* (sub-district) office to check the payment receipts of the JPS money. When the *kecamatan* officials asked her whom she represented, she told them that she represented the people because it is impossible for them to come there altogether. Although grumbling, the official gave her the receipt. From this investigation she found that the head of village had been lying in the amount of money given and people who received the money. She wrote a letter to the head of village and DPRD (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah* or Regional House of Representative) members. However, up to now no action has been taken.

She also monitored the general election in her village, even though she was not invited to do so by the village government. The village government could not stop her from monitoring the election because they knew that she was a member of a women's group in the village, the SPI. Along with another SPI member, she found fraud in the election in which some voters gave their votes more than once. Using fax and telephone, they reported these frauds to the *Camat* (head of sub-district). Since the *Camat* did not pay any attention, she reported it to *Bupati* (head of a district). They still did not receive any response. Using their own money to pay for transportation, Sarinem and other members of SPI went directly to the *Bupati's* office. Up to now, there is yet to be any action taken to address their report.

According to her, monitoring and control of village government have been ineffective because of the people's fear and lack of solidarity. Because of her activities in monitoring village government she has been frequently threatened and excluded by the village government. Although from discussions with other members of SPI she has been considered as one of the most idealistic members of SPI, village government made her an example of bad impacts of women who participate in such organisations. Young women as members of SPI were threatened not to join SPI because they will become like Sarinem 'whose house is dirty like a garage' (NGO1; CBO3, November 2001). Despite her active involvement in community and village governance, she was not elected as a member of VRB in her village.

These case studies demonstrate how SPI stimulates and transforms women's way of thinking. Knowledge and experiences they gain from participating in SPI contribute to the rise of self awareness and confidence among SPI members. These are the cornerstones for their ability to redefine their self identity and reconstruct gender relations at the household and community level. Both cases highlight the centrality of women's personal empowerment in reconstructing gendered household relations. For these women, participation in SPI is used as a strategy to reformulate gender relations to be more equal and harmonious. They used the traditional concept of motherhood to

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expand their responsibility to their community and family. Women's personal empowerment may not only empower women, but can also empower other members of the family and community. Although with different results, both cases reveal that personal empowerment is also useful in challenging discriminative and oppressive power in a community. Personal empowerment, in the above cases, also contributes to collective empowerment.

However, the development of consciousness differs across members of SPI. While some members have been able to reconstruct their household relations and to criticise and monitor their village government, others are yet to have the courage to take the consequences of being excluded from social life.

(Participant): *We must all be brave to tell the truth.*

(Participant): *If we are brave enough to tell the truth, we won't be befriended by others.*

(Participant): *For me, it's no problem if the people in my village do not want to be my friend, because it is in the interest of those people.*

(Participant): *Yes, but the people whom we defend, sometimes do not understand and appreciate us.*

(Participant): *I will reveal untruths, even if because of that I will not have friends* (CBO1, November 2001).

As a result, in some villages in Deli Serdang membership of SPI is frequently changing. Afraid of the threats some women withdraw from SPI. SPI groups whose members are all young women, who are yet to become involved in community affairs, are more vulnerable to the threats from their family and community so their membership is continuously decreasing (CBO2, November 2001).

Empowerment also creates challenges from other people, especially those who perceive that women's empowerment may threaten the power they used to have. At this point, collective empowerment plays a crucial role in strengthening women in facing these challenges.

Collective empowerment

Collective empowerment is the ability to act together as a group to voice and pursue women's interests and reconstruct gender relations in private and public spheres: 'Empowerment must entail as an ultimate goal the ability of the disempowered to act collectively in their own practical and strategic interests' (Kabeer, 1994:256). Thus, collective action has political connotations.

Solving community problems

Strategies used in SPI do not only raise women's awareness of gender issues in their households but expand their understanding and awareness to issues that emerge in their communities. Women in SPI understand that the community's problems are also part of their problems and that they should contribute to community development (CBO1; CBO2; CBO3, November 2001). Together as a group, members of SPI extend their contributions and involvement to community affairs especially those that are related closely to women's interests and needs such as transportation, education and security. In most cases members of SPI have to proactively and creatively search for ways to solve problems in the community and contribute to community development in their village while not creating conflict. For example, an SPI group based near an area in a plantation estate delivered a proposal directly to a private bus company proposing that the company operates bus route which pass their village situated close to a state owned plantation which has regular bus services. Children frequently arrived late at school because they had to walk quite a distance. As one woman expressed: '*Since the 1960s the buses have passed through the plantation area, but they never came to our village. As I grew older I wondered why the route of the buses became further from our village. This is backwardness*' (CBO3, November 2001). Prior to delivering the proposal they reported to the head of village who supported this idea. The proposal was made under the name of the community, not individual SPI members name although it was an SPI initiative. It was a success. Now, not only school children enjoy their mothers' efforts but all members of the community since there are bus services to their village which enable them to travel more easily.

Although it may seem that participation of members of SPI merely extends their domestic and practical interests, through their contribution and participation in fulfilling their community's interests and needs, SPI gradually gains recognition from the community. Community members, especially village women, look to SPI in solving their problems. Village government frequently ignores women's interests and has left the fulfilment of women's interests to women themselves. There was a case in Deli Serdang where the community was disturbed by the existence of 'keyboard porno'⁴¹ (vulgar keyboard) in their village. The community considered this attraction as porn because of the way the female singer dressed and her erotic movements which were perceived as violating the cultural and religious norms in this village. At first women came to head of a ward and asked him to handle this problem, but nothing was done. These village women came to SPI and through discussions they agreed that they would come together to the place of porn keyboard and throw water over the musical instrument so that it could not make music anymore. This resulted in the singers running away. Collaboration with SPI has produced strategic ways to avoid conflict with husbands. *'If we attacked our husbands or the singers then our husband may get angry at us and also we do not want to be violent. By just throwing water, our husbands can't do anything to us'* (CBO3, November 2001). In cases where village government fails to response to women's interests, SPI as a woman's group plays important roles in representing and fulfilling women's interests while also empowering other women who are not their members.

The community and village government seem to be ambiguous towards the preservation of moral and religious principles in the community. While women who participate in SPI have been threatened because they are perceived as being prostitutes, the community and village government do not seriously address the real problems of prostitution. When village women reported to the head of village and the *ulama*

⁴¹ 'Keyboard porno' is a term used by village community to refer to keyboard players whose singers (usually females) sing, dress and act erotically.

(religious leaders) about morality problems created by a *kedai kopi* (coffee shop) in their village which provides prostitutes and alcoholic drinks, they were ignored. For these women, the existence of this kind of coffee house is a great problem since their husbands seldom come home, and drunkenness exacerbates domestic violence and disturbance to the community. Being ignored by the village government and *ulama*, village women who were not members of SPI reported this and asked SPI to help them to bring their husbands home and close the coffee house. Despite these women's suggestion that SPI demonstrates against the owner and the prostitutes, SPI told these women that SPI is a place for women to learn and not to demonstrate. According to SPI the best way to solve problems is through discussion and other nonviolent ways.

When the community felt disturbed by the existence of some prostitutes in our area, they asked us to handle it. Knowing that the community report to us, the prostitutes left our village. They were afraid. They thought that we would do violence to them...actually we won't. We wear T-shirt with 'Solidarity among women' written on them...women are our sisters. We oppose violence. We do not mind giving advice. People understand that we care, that's why they report [problems] to us (CBO3, November 2001).

Just knowing that SPI would meet to discuss this issue, the prostitutes fled from the village. The coffee shop still operates but its opening hours were reduced and the owner promised that he would do his best to stop the coffee shop from disturbing the village community. The name of SPI as a women's group enhances women's credibility to act. Through group activities in transforming gender relations and in solving problems in the community SPI gain more recognition from the community. Although SPI lack formal power, it has been able to solve community problems which village government has ignored and been unable to solve. The basis of SPI power is solidarity, non violence, sensitivity and responsiveness to women's and community's interests and needs. With this kind of power SPI as a women's group can be strategically used to protect women's interests and needs.

On the other hand, collective empowerment may also threaten the existing power holders. According to women in SPI, some officials in village government threaten members of SPI because of their fear of SPI. This implicitly implies recognition of the growing power of SPI:

(Participant): *Why did the head of village not support us? He was afraid to involve us because we would know his wrong doings...SPI become threatening for them [laughter].*

(Participant): *Even though they know we are a women's organisation, the terror from village officials have been so threatening. He thinks we want to overthrow him (CBO1, November 2001).*

Demanding accountability

Collective empowerment enables SPI to expand its involvement in village governance such as in monitoring and demanding accountability from the village government. However, women's groups frequently have to be strategic in exerting their collective power to avoid conflict. Understanding that they could foster further rejection and conflict from the village government, women in SPI build alliances with *remaja mesjid* (Moslem youth group). While ignoring women's organisations, the village government built good relationships with *remaja mesjid*. On the other hand *remaja mesjid* respect and listen to women because they are their like their mother. Members of SPI raise awareness among *remaja mesjid* to be accountable to their village by encouraging them to monitor and put demand on village government. In one case, these women encouraged *remaja mesjid* to ask for accountability from a head of village regarding the use of money that was collected by *remaja mesjid* and was given to be kept by head of village. This head of village never reported on the use of this money. Encouraged by members of SPI, *remaja mesjid* asked the head of village how their money had been used and was informed that this money has been used to cover transportation of the head of village. Members of SPI explained to the *remaja mesjid* that the money should not be used for the head of village's transportation because there is already a budget for that kind of expense. They further encourage these youth to be elected as head of ward so they can monitor village government effectively (CBO3, November 2001). Thus, while women have frequently been threatened and oppressed due to their sexuality, they strategically use their position as mothers to pursue their interests while avoiding conflict with men in their community.

By moving together as a group, women have more confidence in demanding their rights in using village resources for their interests. For example, when the head of village which has been determined by members of SPI as a place for SPI's *pertemuan akbar*⁴² (great meeting) forbid women to use their members' house in his village as a place for the meeting, women of SPI discussed how to be able to conduct *pertemuan akbar* while at the same time avoiding further conflict with the head of village. They finally decided to use public ground as their place of meeting. They told the head of village their decision, and arguing that since it was a public ground and as members of the community they also pay levy for the cleaning and maintenance of the ground they should be allowed to use the public ground. These women cited chapter 28 of the Indonesian Constitution which states citizen's freedom of expression and organizing in arguing for their right to use the public ground. Although the head of village did not come, the great meeting was successfully held on that public ground (CBO2, November 2001).

SPI extends its collective empowerment to put demands on government outside their village government on issues that threaten national interests. Facilitated by HAPSARI, members of SPI from diverse villages performed demonstration during *siaga I* (a situation in which government declares that the state is in a critical situation) demanding government to lower the prices of *sembako* (*sembilan bahan pokok* or the nine basic necessities). They called their action WARSO (*wadah aliansi rakyat untuk sembako* or people's alliance network for nine basic necessities). According to members of SPI this kind of demonstration is important since women know more about *sembako* than university students. Thus, it is more effective if women, whose perceived domestic responsibilities are closely related to *sembako*, are the ones who put demands to government (NGO1, November 2001).

⁴² *Pertemuan Akbar* is an annual activity of SPI in which members of SPI from diverse villages meet.

Although the prices have still not been lowered, women's ability to gather such a large number of women and their courage to move and take risk in putting demands on government outside their village should be considered as a significant form of collective empowerment. It requires significant courage to be able to ask and negotiate with government in a nationally critical situation. Participating in women's marches or demonstrations is in itself empowering to women because this is a new way of experiencing political activities for most of these village women who have never been involved in these kinds of activities. Although some women trembled in fear, solidarity and feelings of security in their togetherness as a group make them enjoy their participation in the demonstrations. The support and knowledge they gain from SPI regarding their rights as citizens and community members gives them the courage to speak more confidently and meaningfully in negotiating with local government officials and others, as the following field transcripts highlight:

(Participant): *Writing documents or letters are not effective because some of us are illiterate, well... we live in villages. But if we ask the members to demonstrate, they will willingly demonstrate.*

(Participant): *We are used to walking in bare feet, especially when it is intended to voice women's interests.*

(Participant): *We were accused of receiving money to participate in this demonstration. We said to these policemen who accused us that we are the ones who pay for their uniforms through the tax we pay. We buy our own uniforms with our own money.*

(Participant): *When demonstrating, we asked the police not to shoot us, but instead to shoot the mango for us... the policemen become ashamed. Finally they asked the policewomen to deal with us.*

(Participant): *Prior to doing demonstration we were informed of what we were going to demand.*

(Participant): *We also understand the risk...being taken and caught.*

(Participant): *But none of us have been caught.*

(Participant): *The police women asked us why we stood in the hot sun and what the problem is. We said we are used to work under the sun. We work in rice fields. We said that our husbands are laborers and they were oppressed.' That's why you should give way to us' we said to them.*

(Participant): *They asked us to go home because they said what we were doing is useless. We said that we should struggle and that they should sympathise and take sides with us because people in the village can no longer eat rice. 'Look at us', we said, 'we have to eat cassava because we can no longer afford to buy rice'.*

(Participant): *We have never been caught [by police or the military] in our demonstration we demonstrate in disciplined manner (CBO3, November 2001).*

As a group, members of SPI have more courage and confidence to express their self and group identity to the power holders that not only they, but also the community's fear. SPI provides women with support and networks that enhance women's confidence and ability to participate in village governance. Recently many members of SPI have been elected as members of VRB in their village. SPI also actively participates in the formation of an association of female members of VRB in Deli Serdang which provides room for women who have been elected as member of VRB to share their experiences and also receive trainings on issues such as village government, producing village regulations, roles, rights and obligations of members of VRB. I will elaborate these issues in the following chapter.

SUMMARY

This chapter demonstrates the significance of women organizing themselves in making their voice more effectively heard by the community and government. The interlocking of private and public patriarchy which has oppressed women in Deli Serdang requires the strengthening of solidarity among women to work together creatively in reconstructing gendered relations at the household and community level, so they can play a role in local governance.

SPI as a rural women's grassroots organisation provides alternative space for women to learn about and analyse their subordination and gain shared understanding of their subjugation in family, community and government forums through sharing of experiences and discussions among women. By and large women experience a rising consciousness as a result of their engagement in SPI which transforms women's self perception and enhances women's self confidence in reconstructing gendered household

relations. Politicising their sexuality to gain their husband's permission to attend meetings and making alliance with other members of the household are main household strategies that women in Deli Serdang use to extend their mobility.

By participating in SPI, rural women in Deli Serdang transform their personal empowerment to collective empowerment. Through their engagement in SPI women develop solidarity and group identity which leads them to collective action. The discussion above highlight that there are multiple identities and ways in empowering women. Considering the severe threats posed by community and village government, SPI strategically uses subtle and non violent strategies in resisting patriarchal norms and in reconstructing gendered local power relations. Through their involvement and contribution in community affairs they create new identities for themselves and enhance their credibility as a women's group whose capability is not limited to domestic activities but extend to public affairs including monitoring local governance in Deli Serdang. These experiences of SPI as rural grassroots women in empowering women in Deli Serdang imply there is an urgent need to incorporate women's agency (in analysing women's personal and collective empowerment) in order to understand and promote effective strategies for enhancing women's participation in local governance.

CHAPTER EIGHT

DECENTRALISATION IN NORTH SUMATRA: BRINGING LOCAL GOVERNANCE CLOSER TO WOMEN?

INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims at exploring the dynamics of interaction between women and local government in North Sumatra. The implementation of Law No.22/1999 on decentralisation and local government brings structural, political and institutional changes to local government in Indonesia which influences the realisation of gender equity in North Sumatra and else where in the country. Thus, discussion on the impacts of the implementation of this law is crucial in understanding the dynamics of local governance.

Decentralisation which is the devolution of power from central government to local government is seen by some as opening up more space for women at the grassroots level to enhance their participation and influence in decision making at the local level. However, the case study of North Sumatra in implementing Law 22/1999 on decentralisation and local government in Indonesia highlights both the opportunities and threats decentralisation brings about in enhancing women's involvement in implementing and benefiting from decentralisation. This chapter argues that as long as decentralisation only focuses on devolving power to the bureaucracy while neglecting gender interests, local government will remain gender insensitive. Although rules, policies and institutions are important in enhancing women's participation in local governance, in order for decentralisation to realise gender equity in North Sumatra, the transformation of the bureaucracy, community and culture is urgently needed.

This chapter will firstly discuss the previous local government mechanism for implementing development policies aimed at women at the local level in North Sumatra, which is known as TPP2W. After briefly describing the implementation of decentralisation in North Sumatra in general, this chapter will explore institutional changes in local government mechanisms for women that have occurred due to the implementation of decentralisation. Exploration of structural, cultural and financial barriers facing the newly established women's empowerment bureaus and sections, leads us to understand the complexity and challenges facing local government in implementing women's empowerment programs at the local level. It highlights the vulnerability of local government women's units and local government development policies in realising gender equity due to the persistence of the gendered dynamics of local government bureaucracy. Discussion on VRB (Village Representative Body or *Badan Perwakilan Desa/BPD* or) highlights problems facing women at the grassroots level and their strategies in struggling to redefine decentralisation so that it may best serve their interests and needs. Finally, the case study of VRB Deli Serdang demonstrates that by collaborating with community based organisations and NGOs, women at the grassroots may effectively enhance their participation and influences in local governance.

TPP2W: 'only' an on-paper central government programme for the enhancement of women's role at the local level?

Prior to the implementation of Law 22/1999, TPP2W⁴³ Sumatra Utara (*Tim Pengelola Program Peningkatan Peran Wanita Dalam Pembangunan Daerah* or Management Team for the Enhancement of Women's Role in Development at the Local Level), which was based on Presidential Instruction no.5/1995, served as the only coordinating body of local government involved in enhancing local women's role in development in

⁴³ After the implementation of Law No.22/1999, TPP2W has been replaced by Women's Empowerment Bureau (at provincial level) and Women's Empowerment Section (at district/city level).

North Sumatra. TPP2W, as can be seen in Figure 5 (page 265), was headed by the Vice Governor who acted as the coordinator. Its members included: BAPPEDA (*Badan Perencana Pembangunan Daerah* or Regional Development Planning Board), Bangdes (*Pembangunan Desa/ Village Development*) and related vertical and regional/local agencies such as: agencies of health, social development, agriculture, industry and trade, Women Studies Centres, community organizations, NGOs, and state owned enterprises. Through coordination among these diverse stakeholders at the local level, development programs in North Sumatra were expected to be more responsive to women's interests and needs. The scope of its programmes focused heavily on economic development and aimed especially at women with low incomes and education level or those who were vulnerable socially. In ensuring the effectiveness of the coordinating role of TPP2W, every three months there should have been a coordination meeting among team members. TPP2W also had the obligation to report on the implementation of women's development programmes in North Sumatra to the Vice Governor every three months.

Despite its goal to increase the effectiveness of local government in enhancing women's role in development at the local level, TPP2W faced challenges in its operation. The relationship between central and local government, the structure of TPP2W and the lack of understanding and political will for women's empowerment have interlinked to obstruct the achievements of TPP2W. There was a widespread perception among local government officials that TPP2W was merely an enforcement of central government power on local government in which the central government transferred the burden for women's empowerment down to local government.

The structural weakness of TPP2W as an additional program assigned by central government was repeatedly emphasised by local government officials in explaining the constraints of TPP2W in enhancing women's participation at the local level (LGO2; LGO3; LGO4, December 2001). Local government officials were also critical of MNPP (Ministry for Women's Empowerment) which they perceived as lacking power to influence central government agencies to implement gender mainstreaming. A local government official remarked:

MNPP obligates the regional development planning board (BAPPEDA) to conduct gender mainstreaming programs, but it does not have the capability to require the national development planning board (BAPPENAS) to do the same. Those high government officials from Jakarta came here to give instructions and conduct gender training. How much money have they spent? [He mentioned the high cost for high government officials needed to visit a region]. Why don't they trust local government or Women Studies Centers in these regions to do those programs? (LGO4, December 2001).

By pointing to the lack of central government's financial support for the instructed programs, local government officials perceive that central government has not been serious about empowering women. Local government has been disappointed with central government since many gender related programs proposed by BAPPEDA were ignored by the central government. Many other concerns are centred around inadequate funding from central government. A local government official argues that '*TPP2W is a central government project which is not supported by adequate funds*' (LGO2, December 2001). Central government devolving tasks to local government in implementing gender mainstreaming policies, programs and projects without providing adequate fund has been seen by most LGOs involved in TPP2W as central government imposition which increases local government's burden.

Based on the Governor's instructions regarding TPP2W, apart from funds provided by the central government (APBN/national government budget), level I and II local government should provide funds in their APBD (regional government budget) for the implementation of the TPP2W program. Local government officials perceived that they were more serious than central government in implementing gender mainstreaming programs since the provincial government of North Sumatra provided Rp.100 million for 1999/2000 (BPS 2001) budget for women's empowerment programs and Rp.500 million for 2001 women's empowerment programs for all regions in North Sumatra (LGO1; LGO4; LGO7, December 2001).

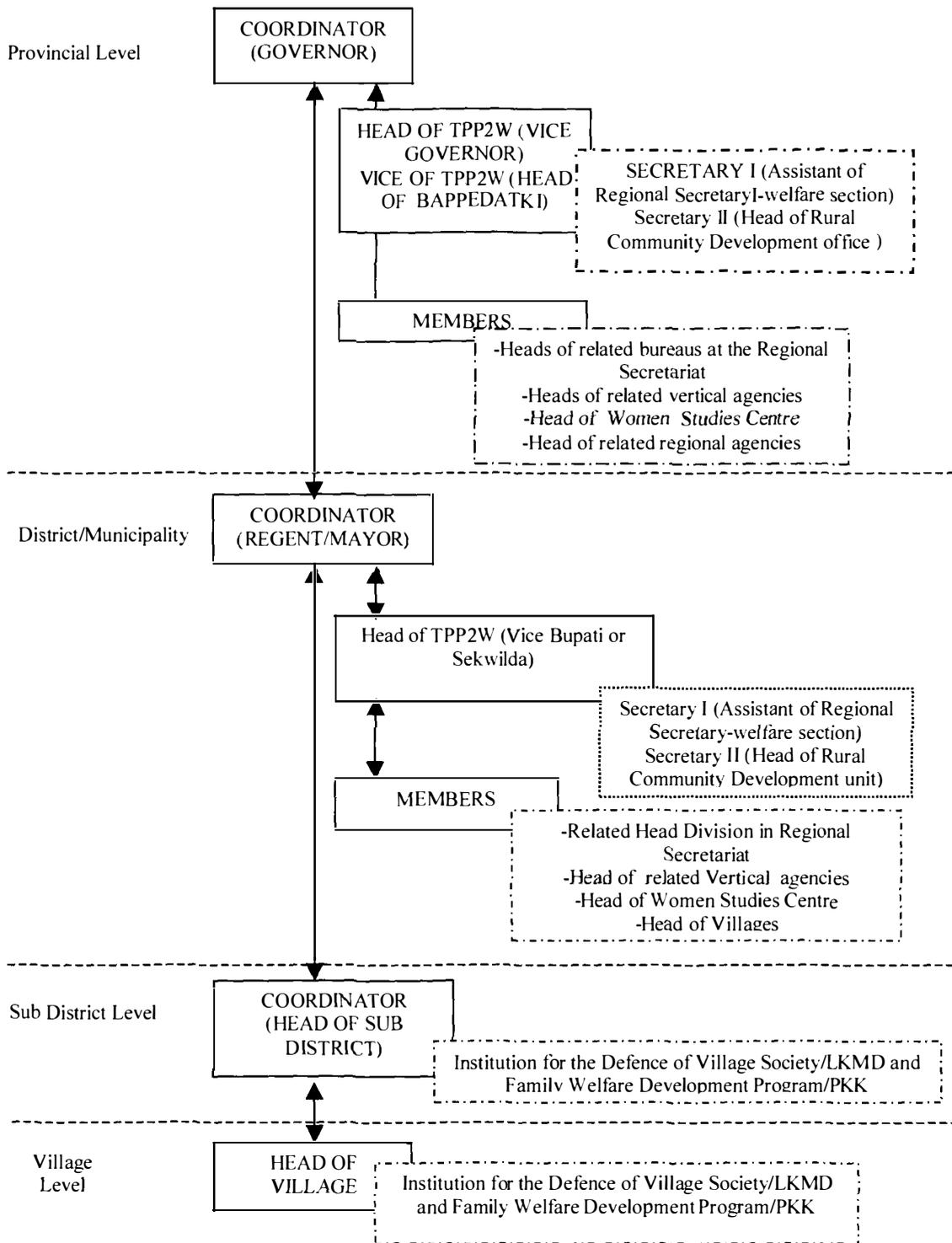
The structure of TPP2W was considered by local government officials as ineffective since it was only a coordinating body of local government which lacked the power in

implementing and monitoring the implementation of women's empowerment programs at the regional or local level. The coordination function was interpreted by most members of TPP2W as restricted to providing reports. TPP2W members perceived that their role in this coordinating body was limited to calling for attention and encouraging local government agencies to be gender sensitive in their programs and projects (LGO 2; LGO3; LGO4, December 2001). The head of TPP2W described the weak position of TPP2W as follows:

The enhancement of women's participation at the local level is not institutionalised. I was appointed as the head of TPP2W due to my position as vice governor. All vice governors all over Indonesia become the head of TPP2W. So, this is an extra/additional position in relation to my position as vice governor. It is not a structural position rather it is just coordinative in the way of ...Firstly, they (local government agencies) conduct their working meeting and activities. Then they report to me. We never meet in order to make plans. Secondly, TPP2W asks local government agencies to participate in assisting women in their activities. So, this is a coordinating position. If you asked about its performance ...frankly speaking, TPP2W does not have core staff or assistant staff. So we can only encourage local government agencies to work well and encourage women to be able to participate in society as well as in government (LGO2, December 2001).

The perception that central government has not been serious in implementing gender mainstreaming at the local level combines with the lack of power of TPP2W significantly curtailing its effectiveness. These strengthened local government officials' ignorance of the implementation of gender mainstreaming policies at the local level which can be seen by the lack of knowledge about TPP2W among local government officials involved in TPP2W, their pessimistic views about TPP2W and the lack of documented information about TPP2W in local government agencies. The only available documentation on TPP2W in my experience was limited to the legal foundation of its formation and a report from the women's empowerment section. During my interview with local government officials involved in TPP2W, I even found that one key person involved in TPP2W asked me back to explain what TPP2W stands for and its roles (Field notes, 12/12/01).

Figure 5: Previous Organisational Structure of TPP2W



Source: Siahaan based on Inmendagri No.17/1996

Lack of communication among team members also contributed to the ineffectiveness of TPP2W in implementing its roles and obligations. Members of TPP2W admitted that they rarely meet to discuss programmes, let alone to plan and to evaluate on the performance of local government agencies in implementing gender mainstreaming policies, which were TPP2W roles (LGO2; LGO4; WSC1; WSC2, December 2001). Since the formation of TPP2W, members had only met twice, once at the initial formation of TPP2W and another time when members were asked to make reports. Accordingly, members of TPP2W did not know what to report since they rarely met. A member of TPP2W described the role of local government as the coordinator of TPP2W as: *'Only asking for reports. No coordination at all. TPP2W is only an on paper program for the enhancement of women's role in development at the local level'* (WSC1, December 2001). TPP2W did not function fully and it has failed to have programs that really touch grassroots women's interests and needs in North Sumatra (LGO5, December 2001). The dysfunction of TPP2W has been pointed out by some of its members as evidence of local government's lack of commitment and lack of concern in enhancing women's condition in North Sumatra (NGO12; WSC1; WSC2, December 2001)⁴⁴.

Monitoring and evaluation of the achievement of local government agencies in implementing women's enhancement roles in their programme, which was the main function of TPP2W, was difficult to perform. Despite central government intention to give power to TPP2W in conducting gender mainstreaming at the local level, it bypassed this management team by directly transferring money to local government agencies. TPP2W has no knowledge about the money transferred by central government which contributed to the difficulties in monitoring the implementation of women's empowerment programmes at the local level (LGO2; LGO5, December 2001). A local

⁴⁴ WSC1 and WSC2 refer to participants from Women's Studies Centers.

government official described the disadvantageous position of local government as follows:

Actually, I am the one who should coordinate [women's empowerment programmes], but not in practice. Some funds and programmes are placed in Binsos (Bina Sosial or Social Development) agency and some are included in education and training programmes. So, I just receive reports in which they report their activities. I only encourage local government agencies to assist women. Medan's people have a phrase to describe our position 'Kalau balanya sama kami, labanya enggak tahu kami' ("while the risk is upon us, we do not know about the benefit") (LGO2, December 2001).

As the coordinating body for enhancing women's role in development at the local level, the only relationship TPP2W had with local government agencies was through reports. Despite the obligation of TPP2W members (local government agencies) to report every three months, these agencies rarely did so and only when asked by the governor (LGO2; LGO4; LGO5; December 2001). Reports were provided in a short time since the governor urgently needed them to attend the Rakernas (*rapat kerja nasional* or national working meeting). Consequently, TPP2W which was responsible for compiling and producing the final report did not have much knowledge on the quality and truthfulness of the reports. As a local government noted: *'We don't know whether it is an ABS (Asal Bapak Senang or "as long as the boss happy") report. We have to include what they report in the final TPP2W report'* (LGO5, December 2001). The lack of knowledge on the report was obvious when I asked the person who was responsible for the final production of the report what *'perempuan sosial'* ("social women") in her report meant. She admitted that she herself did not understand but had to include it because if she did not include it the office which produced that report would be angry (Field notes, 1/12/2001). Thus, TPP2W was merely an 'on-paper central government programme' (LGO5; WSC1; WSC2, December 2001).

Now I will turn the discussion from TPP2W as a coordinating body for women's empowerment to Women's Empowerment Section which was the implementing body for women's empowerment programmes.

Women's Empowerment Section

In addition to TPP2W there was a women's empowerment section at the provincial government office which was responsible for the production of the TPP2W report. This women's empowerment section which was integrated in the Youth, Sport and Women bureau, was the vehicle of the provincial government for implementing development programmes for women. The women's empowerment section had a limited budget and authority in implementing development programmes for women. In order to be able to receive a portion of the regional development budget for women's empowerment programmes, the women's section had to make a proposal through Regional Development Project List (*Daftar Isian Proyek Daerah*), then to regional secretary, and to the governor to be included in the Local Government Budget APBD (*Anggaran Pendapatan dan Belanja Daerah*). After the women's section received the money, it distributed it to organisations which applied for funding for women's empowerment activities.

Many women's organisations which applied for funding from the local government through this women's section described their disappointment at the complicated application process and unresponsiveness of this section. This local government body was slow to respond to applicants' proposals and it was very difficult to contact the Women's Empowerment Section and to get information regarding the results of their proposal. Moreover, some of the applicants argued that instead of helping women's organisations in conducting their activities, local government increases the burden on women by taking a percentage of the fund they should receive (WSC2; NGO11; NGO12, December 2001). As a result of these issues, many women's organisations have been reluctant in making further proposals to the local government. Thus, while the local government, as has been described above, is disappointed by the way central government implements gender mainstreaming at the local level, women's organisations at the local level argue that the central government, in this case the MenUPW, should increase its power over local government to ensure the local government commits to women's empowerment programs at the local level (WSC2; NGO11, December 2001).

Implementing Decentralisation in North Sumatra

I now move on to look explicitly at problems with implementing decentralisation in North Sumatra, before considering the implications of decentralisation on women in the area.

Based on Law 22/1999 the central government devolves power down to the local government in managing development in their regions. Besides the stated prospect of decentralisation in fostering local development, it creates tension between central and local government but also increases horizontal conflict among communities based on locality and ethnicity. Ambiguities and contradictions between regional autonomy law and implementing regulations create conflicts between regions and confusion among local government officials (Keputusan Gubsu No. 050/3689/K/2000). For example, there is a contradiction between Law 22/1999 chapter 4 (2) which states that regions/provinces, districts and cities are independent and nonhierarchical towards one another, while based on chapter 112 the provincial government has the duty to guide districts/cities. Law 22/1999 does not explicitly describe the implementing regulations and mechanisms that can be used to manage problems/disputes that emerge from the lack of coordination among regions and localities. Lack of clear regulation on coordination is the most frequent concern directed at decentralisation since it detracts from synergy among regions (LGO2; LGO7; LGO16, December 2001). Without coordination, there is a possibility that policies and programs of one area will be harmful to another area.

Ambiguity in Law 22/1999 also contributes to the lack of responsibility of local government in delivering its services to communities. In one of my research sites there was a case of a heavily leaking dam which was left unnoticed by the local government. It was threatening to the community since if this dam was not reconstructed it could soon flood the whole village nearby the dam. The community had reported this case to the municipal government and even invited the media to cover the issue. But the municipal government told them to report it to provincial government because the dam was not under their jurisdiction. However, the provincial government argued that the

municipal government was the one which should be responsible for reconstructing the dam (Field notes 1/11/01).

Confusion and lack of understanding on Law No22/99 among local government officials at all levels contributes to the ineffectiveness of local government officials in disseminating information about regional autonomy to the community. The dissemination of Law No.22/1999 to the community is limited to informing them about the written law without having discussions about this or allowing for dialogue (LGO16, December 2001). Consequently, members of the community are left without adequate knowledge on the implementation of this law and they have diverse interpretations to what constitutes regional autonomy. Many suspicions and conflicts between community and local government emerge as the result of this lack of knowledge (LGO2; LGO9; LGO10, December 2001). There are cases where members of the community do not want to pay for waste collection since they perceive that the administration fund for the head of *kelurahan* (urban locality) is to be used to cover the management of waste (LGO9, December 2001).

The emphasis of decentralisation on government at the municipal/district, sub district and village level is considered by provincial government officials as dangerous since it provides opportunity for the emergence of *raja-raja kecil* (small/petty kings) at these levels of government (LGO1; LGO2; LGO16, December 2001). With the power they have and lack of coordination, there is a possibility that these levels of local government abuse their power. A provincial local government official pointed to a case in which a local government used funds from the central government, earmarked to pay teachers' salaries, to develop other projects, as evidence that district/city governments are yet to be ready to have greater power assigned to them in implementing regional autonomy (LGO16). There were also cases where heads of local governments left their regions for a long periods without any notice (Field notes 6/12/2001).

Local government officials in all tiers have a similar perception that central government has not been serious in devolving power to local government since it does not devolve

power in managing money. Thus, one local government official said: '*Central government gives autonomy but holds it by the tails* [is not willing to really devolve power to local government], *especially in regional income*' (LGO9, December 2001). Although based on Law 22/1999 local governments receive a greater proportion of local revenue than before, yet most of the strategic local revenue is still controlled by central government. For example, in the case of North Sumatra, local revenue derives from the plantation estates controlled by the central government. Central government supports implementation of regional autonomy only through central government transfer (*Dana Alokasi Umum*) which is according to local government officials only enough to pay for the civil servants' salaries. With central government controlling revenue from the plantation estates which is strategic to local revenue in North Sumatra, decentralisation may transform North Sumatra. Both local government and community members are worried that North Sumatra may be transformed into a poor region rather than fostering development in the area (LGO4; LGO9; NGO10, December 2001).

Considering that local revenue is crucial for the success of decentralisation, local government focuses heavily on increasing local revenue. Many Perda (*Peraturan Daerah* or Regional Laws) regarding taxes and levies have been issued in order to increase regional and local revenue. Therefore, there is a widespread perception among the community that local government is concerned more with increasing local revenue than realising people's welfare through enhancement of popular participation (NGO10, NGO2; NGO5, November 2001). In one district in North Sumatra, all Perda which were issued by its local government in implementing Law 22/1999 related to levies and retribution. A leader of an NGO contends:

Local government relates regional autonomy with the increase of levies and retributions. Almost 60% of Perda is about levies. All of the community's small industries are being taxed. For example, local government increases tax for the production of bricks to 100%. While local government collects tax, it is yet to be transparent and accountable (NGO10, November 2001).

Study in three districts in North Sumatra identified the tendency of local government to increase taxes as creating a high cost economy which increases the burden of farmers, traders, and small producers and consumers in North Sumatra (SMERU, 2003).

The Impact of Decentralisation on Women in North Sumatra

There have been ambiguous perceptions regarding the roles and position of women in decentralisation and the impact of decentralisation on women in North Sumatra. In describing women's roles and position in decentralisation, local government frequently uses an efficiency⁴⁵ argument which sees women as human resources to achieve development more efficiently as women constitute a large percentage of population in North Sumatra⁴⁶.

While women's potential contribution to development is widely accepted by local government officials and mentioned in local government's development policy documents, the performance of the local government in distributing benefits of development to women and the accessibility of women to local development resources have yet to be satisfactory. For example, in North Sumatra the illiteracy rate was higher among women (14.06%) than men (6.27%). Also, there were more women unemployed (7.54%) than men (5.68%) (BPS, 2001). A report on the implementation of the women's empowerment programme in North Sumatra (2000), reveals that only five from the 17 districts/municipalities in North Sumatra have allocated funds for the "Love the Mother Movement" (*Gerakan Sayang Ibu/GSI*) which aims at decreasing mortality of mothers and children, to more than 50% of their sub-districts. From these five sub-districts, only three had allocated the funds to more than 50% of their villages. Some districts/municipalities did not have budget for GSI at all.

The marginal position of women in North Sumatra is more obvious when considering the level of participation in formal politics. A report on the implementation of women's empowerment development in North Sumatra (TPP2W 2000) acknowledges women's

⁴⁵ See Moser (1989) regarding the efficiency approach to development planning for women.

⁴⁶ Of a 11,722,397 total population, 5,863,188 are women and 5,859,209 are men (BPS 2001).

subordinate position in society by pointing to the small numbers of women in North Sumatra who hold important positions in government and society. While North Sumatra's GDI value (Gender Development Index) improved from 65.0 (rank 4 in Indonesia) in 1996 to 61.2 (rank 3rd) in 1999, its GEM (Gender Empowerment Measurement) declined from 62.5 (rank 7th) to 47.3 (rank 16th) for the same years (UNDP 2001). Women's representation in Medan city parliament declined from five in 1997 to only two in 2000. From the total membership of 775 at the provincial and regency/city parliament in 2001, there were only 18 women (BPS 2001).

There are diverse views on the impact of decentralisation on women in North Sumatra. The view that decentralisation has a gender neutral impact argues that decentralisation works in a gender neutral framework based on individual capability. Both men and women may equally benefit or be disadvantaged by the processes of decentralisation. This view believes that decentralisation does not pose specific obstructions for women as long as they have the capability to participate in decentralisation (LGO1; LGO17; PKK,⁴⁷ December 2001). The success of local government in implementing decentralisation will automatically contribute to the betterment of women since local government will provide greater budget for women's empowerment programs.

An optimistic view on decentralisation points to the establishment of local government units for women's empowerment, with more power and resources than the previous ones, as the key for the success of women's empowerment programmes at the local level. For example, the development of Women's Empowerment Section to Women's Empowerment Bureau (WEB) in 2002, was made possible due to the implementation of decentralisation. WEB has its own budget and that all budget specifically aimed at women should be directed through this bureau (LGO2; LGO5, December 2002). With WEB as the local government's channel for women's empowerment programmes, it

⁴⁷ PKK refers to participant from the PKK (Family Welfare Empowerment).

will be easier to monitor and ensure that women benefit from local development programmes (LGO2, December 2002).

On the other hand, the pessimistic view argues that decentralisation will be more threatening and dangerous for women. While previously the central government had greater power to impose and monitor the implementation of gender sensitive programs at the local level, now it is totally dependent on the willingness and wisdom of local governments. Thus, if the head of local government lacks knowledge and commitment to gender issues, women in that region will be left behind in the local development process. A local government official contends:

Before regional autonomy we had more support from the central government. After the implementation of regional autonomy, the implementation of programs related to women and in gender mainstreaming depends on the regions. It seems that the implementation of development programmes for women become totally dependent on whether the local government head and its agencies have concerns for women (LGO2, December 2001).

Decentralisation allows for the revitalisation of local patriarchal values which can be more oppressive to women. A leader of SPI expressed her anxiety as to the impact of decentralisation as follows:

We are yet to understand regional autonomy. We just learn together with JOIPARA [an NGO]. Leaders of SPI believe that regional autonomy is not a guarantee to the representation and inclusion of women's voice in local governance. We believe that regional autonomy will create local power which is influenced greatly by culture and religion which all put pressure on women and prevent women from attaining their freedom (CBO3, November 2001).

If local government is yet to be effective in disseminating information on Law No.22/1999 to the community in general, it has been particularly ineffective in disseminating this law to women. Many cases at the grassroots level pointed to the neglect of local government in disseminating information on regional autonomy to women by rarely inviting women to the dissemination of regional autonomy (NGO5; CBO2; CBO3; NGO4; NGO2, November 2001). Consequently, women have less knowledge than men regarding the implementation of regional autonomy. During my field research I found that female research participants at the grassroots level were more

confused than male participants when discussing local government and regional autonomy. While male members of NGOs analysed regional autonomy in their discussions, female members of NGOs did not raise this issue (field notes 23/11/01). Women were sometimes invited to meetings on the dissemination of Law 22/1999 but they were not involved in planning or decision making. A leader of an NGO remarked '*After disseminating information about regional autonomy, local government ignored women. Suddenly local government regulations were issued without consulting women*' (NGO1, November 2001). It is very difficult for women to have access to the formulation of local government development policies let alone to monitor the performance of local government in implementing Law 22/1999. The unwillingness of local government to consult women in policy formulation is described by a member of an NGO focusing on women as follow:

We have asked local government to give us information and let us have a look at Perda before local government issues the Perda. But they say that local government has formulated the Perda. They promise that they will give a copy of the proposed Perda, but up to now we have yet to receive it and the Perda has been issued (NGO5, November 2001).

In their attempt to monitor the performance of local government in implementing decentralisation, women were more vulnerable to threats that came from local government. For example, in one of the research sites, while both women and men participated in joint class action and demonstrations against the fictitious establishment of public health centre in the accountability report of head of local government, local government specifically threatened women by using both military and youth organisation. Local government officials called on women who signed the petition in rejecting the report and asked them to cancel their signatures. Some women did do so because they were frightened of the threat that they would be imprisoned (NGO10; CBO3, November 2001).

Another concern about the gendered impacts of regional autonomy is that local government, by focusing heavily on achieving economic growth, may increase women's burden through their ignorance of women's multiple burdens, interests and needs.

(Participant): *Regional autonomy is more concerned about money, transportation, etc. It's all about money. It is more oppressive to women. I read in newspaper that the local government raised tax on bricks by up to 100%. Most of the brickmakers in our area are women. Autonomy is a burden.*

(Participant): *Women face huge constraints in regional autonomy. For example, we [women] find it very difficult to have access to the village representative body in our village.*

(Participant): *From our discussion we can assume local government made women as objects in implementing decentralisation.*

(Participant): *In a normal situation women have faced many problems. With regional autonomy the problems increase. While regional autonomy creates problems for both men and women, it is more disadvantageous to women since women have already experienced huge problems all this time (NGO2, November 2001).*

Besides pessimism regarding regional autonomy, women also have expectations that regional autonomy needs to be empowering to women in the way that it enhances women's accessibility to local development resources and benefits.

(Researcher): *As a woman, what do you expect from regional autonomy?*

(Participant): *I expect equity. For example, VRB which is the lowest level of governance should be accessible and transparent to women.*

(Participant): *Women's empowerment. I mean women have knowledge, skills, and earn their own money. Local government should provide an adequate budget for women so women can progress more.*

(Participant): *I think [it should improve the] community's welfare. People should unite to control government. But up to now we haven't. If we had gained welfare then we would not put much demand on government anymore (NGO2, November 2001).*

Table 3 (page 276 and 277) summarises the perceptions of diverse stakeholders in local governance in North Sumatra on constraints, potentials, strategies/actions and indicators of gender sensitive local governance. It highlights the urgency of raising gender awareness among the people and local government in order to ensure that processes and institutions for implementing regional autonomy are gender sensitive and responsive to women's interests and needs.

Table 3: Potentials and obstacles of decentralisation to empowerment of women in North Sumatra

Groups	CBOs/NGOs	LGO	Academics	DPRD/students/ Media
Potentials	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The existence of institutions/ community organisations. 2. Women's potential in planning and implementing development programmes in regional autonomy. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The existence of women's empowerment focal points in districts/municipalities and sub districts. 2. The existence of community organisations: PKK, IWAPI, etc. 3. Women as the majority of population. 4. Professions: doctors, nurses/midwives 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The existence of Law 25/2000, 19/2001, 22/1999) 2. Women's potentials. 3. Men's commitment to women's empowerment. 4. Regional autonomy and regional budget (APBD). 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The existence of regional development budget 2. The existence of institution for women's empowerment 3. The issuance of regional laws and regulations 4. Monitoring
Strategies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Providing education for the community especially women. 2. Involving the community including women in policy making. 3. Providing a budget for women's empowerment and political education. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gender-sensitive policies. 2. Reducing women's burden. 3. Consciousness raising on the importance of gender equity to government, judicative, legislative, community organisations, women, religious and cultural leaders. 4. Sharpening gender perspectives in regional/local development planning; gender- sensitive regional/local development programmes, establishing sections for women's empowerment in local government's agencies. 6. Empowering village women 7. The willingness of men to let women to progress 8. Producing law/regulations which protect and ensures women's safety in their working environment 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Revising the law; issuing and disseminating Perda. 2. Reserving seats and allocating budget for women; integrating gender in educational curriculum. 3. Deconstruction of the society; gender consciousness programs; formal and informal education, media. 4. Establishing APBD watch. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Providing women's empowerment budget in APBD. 2. Empowering formal and informal institutions in realising gender equity programs. 3. Producing Perda which accommodate women's rights. 4. Independent monitoring. 5. Enhancing accountability.

Groups	CBOs/NGOs	LGO	Academics	DPRD/students/ Media
Constraints	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Not supported by implementing regulations. 2. Culture. 3. Local government's officials. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The absence of specific mission and mission for women's empowerment. 2. Lack of understanding about PUG (gender mainstreaming) and KKG (gender equity). 3. Women's interests and aspirations are not well accommodated in decision making. 4. Culture/tradition, religion: dependency on men, women's multiple roles in the domestic sphere. 5. Women are not protected. 6. Gender biased Perda. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Inconsistencies between regional autonomy law and organic law. 2. Culture, religion, society's structure. 3. Minimal fund for women's empowerment. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The absence of specific budget for women's empowerment. 2. The small numbers of institutions which are concerned about women's problems. 3. The limited numbers of Perda which guarantee women's rights. 4. Lack of transparency.
Indicators	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Accountability. 2. Sanctions and law enforcement to those who violate the policy. 3. Cooperation between community organisations and government. 4. The increase of women's representation in legislative and decision making bodies (districts/municipalities, sub districts and villages) 5. Gender-sensitive and responsive policies which serve women's interests ex: education, health, law, economy and women's involvement in their formulation. 6. Government's recognition of women's organisations other than <i>PKK</i> and <i>Dharma Wanita</i>. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The incorporation of women's and men's interests in development planning, programs, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. 2. Equal participation of men and women. 3. Equal control. 4. Equal access to development resources. 5. Equal enjoyment of development results. 6. Gender sensitive law/regulations. 7. Equality in law. 8. Community awareness of gender equity (KKG). 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Legal drafting; public hearings; increasing gender equality in the bureaucracy and legislative mechanisms. 2. Gender mainstreaming in bureaucracy. 3. Budget for women's empowerment programs which proportionally match the percentage of women as the majority of the population. 4. Mainstreaming gender in family; creating gender sensitive media. 5. Strengthening budget allocation for women empowerment programs. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Political, economic and law education for women; Budget in APBD. 2. The establishment of women's focal points in local government; leadership training. 3. The existence of Perda which accommodates women's rights. 4. Minimal leakage of funds; follow up actions on findings of power abuse.

Source: SW, 2003.

Gender sensitivity is pointed out as crucial should decentralisation is to achieve gender equity in North Sumatra. There are diverse opinions and definitions on gender-sensitive local governance:

Gender-sensitive local governance is easy to say on paper, but is yet to be realised. I mean...I haven't seen gender-sensitive local government programs. Local government programs are aimed at all women regardless their diversity. Gender-sensitive local government is local government that is responsive to women's needs and has a bottom up approach in serving women. It is impossible to implement women's empowerment programs effectively if programs come from above. On the other hand, women must know what they need (LGO5, December 2001).

Well...gender sensitive local governance is difficult to describe since the law has yet to accommodate women's aspirations. A gender sensitive local government is the one that listens and is responsive to women's needs, and gives room to women. In simple words, gender sensitive local government ensures women's equal representation in local governance. In order to realise gender sensitive local governance we need to synergise with local government, which means women and local government sit together to discuss things (NGO1, November 2001).

Thus, gender-sensitive local governance is not limited only to women's representation in formal politics but extends to the deepening of politics which includes gender equity in representation, participation, control, and access to local development processes and enjoyment of benefits while also being sensitive to diversity among women.

In the following section I will discuss in detail potentials and problems facing Women's Empowerment Bureau which was established due to the implementation of Law No.22/1999 in North Sumatra which are highlighted in Table 3.

The Emerging Women's Empowerment Bureau in North Sumatra

North Sumatra's Propeda (regional development program) for 2001-2005, officially recognises the importance of gender equity for North Sumatra's development (Perda of North Sumatra No.6/2001). Propeda, which is the basis for development programs in North Sumatra included women's empowerment as one of North Sumatra's development program. This policy of women's empowerment recognises women's

individual and collective interests. Interestingly, differing from the previous Propeda, this policy signifies the importance of women's organisations and that the strategy for women should be comprehensive by involving public participation and having the intention to establish mechanisms for gender mainstreaming in all local government units. Perda No.6/2001 describes the main objectives of this policy as:

1. To enhance women's position and role through programs for the enhancement of women's quality of life (education, health, labour, social and welfare, family empowerment, family planning, teenagers' reproductive health).
2. To enhance public participation and the capacity of gender mainstreaming institutions in enhancing the role and independence of institutions for women's empowerment programs (BAPPEDA-SU 2001).

This policy aims at realising gender mainstreaming which is characterised by increasing gender awareness in all government apparatus, especially among planners and decision makers, and the formation of gender mainstreaming units in all regional offices. It also aims at providing diverse instruments and methods to implement gender mainstreaming, and the provision of data and information on gender in all aspects of development (Perda No.6/2001:140). Based on the strategic planning of North Sumatra (*Renstra Sumatra Utara*), the *Biro Pemberdayaan Perempuan* (Women's Empowerment Bureau/WEB) is the main instrument for strengthening local government's capacity in gender mainstreaming. In adapting gender empowerment policies to the community, the WEB cooperates with health, social, employment and transmigration agencies (Perda No.6/2001:107).

These provincial government's policies on women's empowerment are not easily put into practice. It is one thing to integrate women's empowerment into local government policy documents but another to enact them in practical terms. Despite the existence of Propeda, which mentions women's empowerment as one of the priority programmes, in most regions of North Sumatra, the formation of the bureau for women's empowerment faces challenges. While the provincial government of North Sumatra based on Perda No.2/2001 established WEB, there were only three regencies/cities which had a

women's empowerment section: Medan, Taturung and Madina (Mandailing Natal/ Padang Sidempuan). Interestingly, of these three regions, Madina which was just recently formed as a new district/regency, is the only region which has a *badan* (board) for women's empowerment. *Badan* has a higher position than bureau since it has its own office, budget and more staff than a bureau. In other regencies/districts, women's empowerment programs are included in other sections such as social welfare, youth and sport. This tendency highlights challenges facing North Sumatra in realising gender equity as described by Law No.25/2000 and Inpres (Presidential Instruction) No.9/2000 which describes that in 2004, 50 per cent of policies, programs and regulating laws are expected to be gender responsive and that gender mainstreaming focal units should operate in all provinces and in minimally 50 per cent of the districts and cities in Indonesia.

In implementing decentralisation there are a number of difficulties facing the newly established structure for women's empowerment at the local level. Structural, cultural, and financial barriers have intertwined to hinder the formation of women's empowerment bureaus and their operations. These three barriers cannot be isolated from each other. Instead, they interweave thus complicating the implementation of women's empowerment programs in North Sumatra. Below I will discuss these barriers in greater detail.

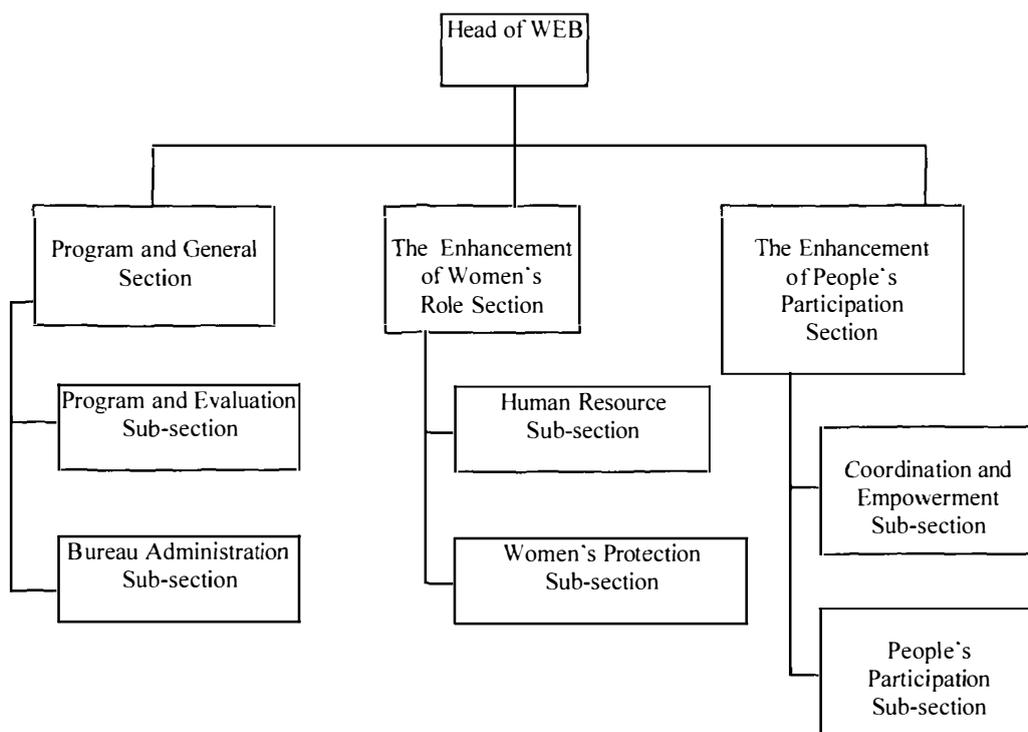
Structural barriers

As highlighted in Table 3, one of the immediate results of regional autonomy in relation to women's empowerment program is the formation of mechanisms for women empowerment in local government units in North Sumatra. The form and status of these focal points differs among tiers of local government. At the provincial level, the status of mechanisms for women's empowerment has been upgraded from a section into a bureau for women's empowerment. Based on North Sumatra province Perda No.2/2001 chapter 14 (16) the Women's Empowerment Bureau (WEB) is the component of Regional Secretariat Staff which is led by a head of bureau who is accountable to the

regional secretary. The head of WEB is assisted by three sections: program and general section (Figure 6).

Based on this Perda, WEB has strategic roles in enhancing and ensuring that local government is gender sensitive in their programs and projects. Its duty is to assist the head of regional government in formulating regional concepts and policies on women's empowerment as well as to conduct coordination, monitoring and evaluation on the implementation of women's empowerment policies in North Sumatra (Perda No2/2001).

Figure 6: Women's Empowerment Bureau



Source: Women's Empowerment Bureau, North Sumatra, 2003

At the municipality level, a section for women's empowerment has also been formed (see Figure 7 page 284). Prior to decentralisation, women's specific issues were placed

under village community development (PMD). This section consists of three sub-sections: policy analysis, people's participation and evaluation and reports.

There have been diverse perceptions and expectations regarding the formation and prospects of the establishment of mechanisms for women empowerment at the provincial and local level. Some point out that the formation of women's focal units as the result of regional autonomy was established in order to realise gender equity through the provision of institutions which aim at enhancing women's capability in competing with men in participating and benefiting from the implementation of regional autonomy (LGO17; LGO5; LGO2, December 2001; SW, January 2003). This optimistic view argues that the establishment of bureaus and sections for women's empowerment at the provincial and local government levels will enhance the achievements of provincial and local government in implementing development policies and programs aimed at the advancement of women due to the increased budget and position of women's empowerment bureau and sections. The formation of mechanisms for women's empowerment at the local and provincial level opens up room for more women to be involved in decision making in local governance. It is also hoped that local government will be more effective in implementing gender mainstreaming policies since there will be many more local government officials who have concern and understanding of gender related issues in local government (LGO5, December 2001).

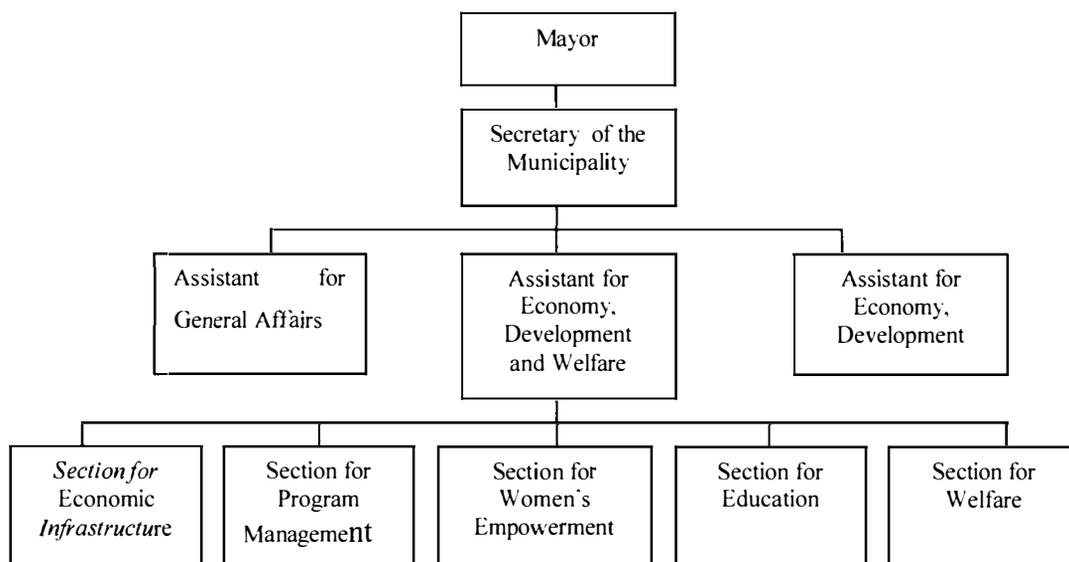
The development of local government mechanisms for women's empowerment, from a section which was integrated into a Youth, Sport and Women bureau into a bureau with higher and more influential status in the local government structure, and with more staff and budget, enhances the status and position of mechanisms for women's empowerment in North Sumatra. Gender empowerment programmes have been frequently ignored by policy makers due to the low position and lack of power of women's empowerment section in local government contributing to the ignorance of policy makers regarding gender empowerment policies and programmes. By becoming a bureau with higher status and power within local government structures, WEB will gain more recognition and respect by other local government officials and sections which is significant to local

government's commitment and effectiveness in implementing gender sensitive policies and programmes. A female local government official remarks:

Previously, it was very difficult to invite other local government agencies to participate in gender mainstreaming activities and gender training. They only came if we included the signature of the governor on our invitation. Now, we do not have to ask the governor to sign our invitations since the head of WEB is an echelon II [high government official] whose signature will be more appreciated by local government agencies (LGO5, December 2001).

Thus, with higher status in the local government structure, it is hoped that WEB will become a control centre for ensuring that local government is committed to implementing gender sensitive development programmes (LGO5, December 2001).

Figure 7: The Position of Women's Empowerment Section at Medan Municipality



Source: Siahaan, based on Perda No.3/2001, Medan, (2002)

By establishing women's empowerment bureaus and sections, provincial and local government are expected to be more functional and active in reaching out to women at the grassroots. Prior to the establishment of these bureaus and sections, communication between local government and women's organisations and NGOs was difficult due to

the obscurity of the provincial and local government structure which deals with women's empowerment programs (NGO12, November 2001). Thus, women empowerment bureaus and sections are important in bridging provincial and local government bureaucracy with grassroots women (NGO12, November 2001; LGO2; LGO5, December 2001).

On the other hand, the formation of units for women's empowerment at the local level is still perceived by some local government officials as a task dictated by central government rather than deriving from local government need to implement decentralisation in North Sumatra effectively. Women's focal points at the local level are established due to instructions from central government, at this point the MenUPW (LGO1, December 2001). The structure and framework for women's focal points at the local level has been determined by central government in order to ensure the uniformity of women's focal points in Indonesia (LGO2, December 2001). Apart from the WEB, other women's focal points at the local level have limited power. A female local government official notes:

Formally we are local government officials. We can't conduct activities outside of the rules that local government make. Activities outside should be made in the name of the head of our office. It is all right to lobby DPR. All programs should be in accordance with the city government policy (LGO17, December 2001).

According to a local government official, in order for women empowerment units to be effective, they should be established as a *badan* (board) rather than a bureau.

Units for women empowerment should not be established only as a bureau. At least it should take the form of a board (*badan*.) A board for women's empowerment will be greater and more empowering since as an office it will have heads of research, training and information sections. By having these sections, local government may conduct training and programs for women's empowerment more effectively since it has information and capable human resources (LGO2, December 2001).

The long established centralistic approach in implementing women's empowerment programs at the local level contributes to the lack of expertise, and experience in

implementing women's empowerment programmes within local government institutions. A male local government official interviewed admits to this:

I admit that we local government officials do yet know what programs really serve women's interests. There have been women's empowerment programs but they have yet to be evaluated [so we do not know] whether through these programs gender equality can be achieved. Frankly speaking we lack consciousness, skills and experience especially in ensuring that gender can be adopted in all sectoral programmes (LGO3, December 2001).

Gender insensitivity of local government is obvious from their lack of understanding as to what gender and gender differences are. Questions about the meaning of gender and gender sensitivity were frequently directed at me during interviews. There was confusion among local government officials in understanding what gender is and how to implement gender empowerment programs mentioned in the Propeda. By and large, local government officials equate gender with PKK (Family Welfare Development Program) and Dharma Wanita (Civil Service Bureaucracy Women's Auxiliary). For example, local government agencies frequently describe giving money to Dharma Wanita as their women's empowerment programs (LGO5, December 2001). When I asked a male local government official his opinion about local government programs for women, he argued that local government has provided adequate fund for gender empowerment since each year Rp.2 million is given to PKK for gender empowerment programs (LGO11, December 2001)⁴⁸. Thus, lack of understanding about women's empowerment is translated into and contributes to failure in formulating and implementing gender sensitive programs.

While national government policies emphasise gender mainstreaming as an integrated strategy for women's empowerment, women's empowerment programmes have been frequently perceived and implemented by local government officials as activities which are separate from other local government activities and programmes. Male and female

⁴⁸ This fund is included in the Rp.10 million fund provided by local government for each *kelurahan*.

local government officials not directly involved in women's empowerment sections mostly argue that they do not know about gender and gender empowerment programmes because it is not their responsibility (LGO1; LGO9; LGO11, December 2001). The responsibility in implementing women's empowerment programmes is placed solely on the women's focal point in local government's units:

Training for local government officials does not differentiate between men and women. But men say that gender training is only for women since it concerns only women. This happens in all level in government. If there is an invitation to women's empowerment training, it will be given to women, or they [men] look for women to take their place in attending our invitation....sometimes [they send] women who have just started working here. It is very difficult to ask policy makers to attend gender training. 'Take your gender...it's for you [women]' they say. Even when they come, they just sit and listen but do not put the knowledge they receive into practice (LGO5, December 2001).

This newly established structure for women's empowerment in North Sumatra still lacks personnel who understand gender and who have knowledge in formulating women's empowerment programs (LGO18, December 2001; SW, January 2003). Lack of knowledgeable personnel contributes to the ignorance of other local government bodies to the capability of WEB in contributing to the attainment of local development. Criticising the capacity and performance of WEB, a male local government official contends: *'Those in the women's empowerment bureau do not know anything about program formulation. It is better that it is integrated'* (LGO3, December 2001). Another male local government official points out that WEB and women's organisations have yet to contribute to the formulation of local government development policies effectively since they do not understand development planning technique and Propeda which is fundamental to local development. Moreover, gender training provided by WEB was perceived as irrelevant to the needs of local government. As a male local government official noted: *'They focus merely on theory...gender, gender equity, but they do not relate theory to practice which is very important if their gender training is to be interesting and useful for other local government bodies'* (LGO4, December 2001).

Competition and conflict with other units in local government bodies is another problem that women empowerment sections urgently need to address in order for these sections to implement women's empowerment programs effectively. At the municipal level this competition emerges due to the lack of regulations which describe the position of PKK under law 22/1999. PKK has been used for a long time by local government as a main instrument in implementing development programs for women at the local level. Prior to the implementation of Law 22/1999 programs related to PKK were handled by the PMD (*Pembangunan Masyarakat Desa* or "Rural Community Development") section. While the women's empowerment section has been recently established at the municipal level, the PKK is still placed under the PMD section. The PMD seems to be reluctant to transfer the management of PKK to the women's empowerment section since it has a long experience in dealing with PKK. PMD perceives that PKK still needs its assistance in formulating programs since, based on previous experiences, PKK is yet to have the capability to formulate their own programs (LGO11, December 2001).

Cultural barriers

Culture has been pointed out by most research participants as a huge constraint to women's empowerment in local government. In a *semiloka* in which I invited diverse stakeholders of local governance to analyse and discuss the gender dimension of decentralisation in North Sumatra, culture dominated the discussion. Despite differences in explaining and understanding the gender dimension of decentralisation in North Sumatra (see Table 3 page 277 and 278), participants of the *semiloka* came to an agreement that culture, which includes of patriarchal values, significantly obstructs women's freedom and capability for participating in and benefiting from local governance in North Sumatra by restricting women's primary obligations and roles to household related activities. Interestingly, a male participant in the *semiloka*, who is a lecturer, posed a critical point on the possibility of the male dominated and patriarchal culture of the local government's bureaucracy as the root of the rising conflicts and obstructions in the implementation of Law 22/1999 in North Sumatra (SW, January 2003).

The persistence of a patriarchal bureaucracy contributes to the marginality of women as decision makers in local government and in the ignorance of local government to gender issues in implementing regional autonomy. The small number of women as decision makers in local government and in regional/local parliament contributes to the neglect of women's voice in policy making. The number of women working in local government is very small thus their voice cannot be heard. A female local government official describes difficulties in voicing women's interests as follows:

When we propose women's empowerment programs they [other local government officials] consider our proposal is yet to be important. They argue that there are other more urgent development programs that need to be prioritised due to the limited local government budget. We may participate in local government meetings but it is very difficult to have our voice heard (LGO5, December 2001).

Similar difficulty in voicing women's interests is also expressed by a female member of parliament at the local level, she says: *'I am the only female proposing the urgency to establish a women's empowerment section in this region. But all other members argue that it is no yet urgent issue and that women's empowerment programmes have been included in other sections'* (MP2, November 2001)⁴⁹. Thus, the marginality of women as decision makers in local government and parliamentary bodies obstructs women from working effectively in voicing women's interests in the midst of male dominated local government bureaucracies and parliaments.

Local government officials frequently point to women's acceptance of culture in explaining the marginality of women in local government (LGO1; LGO2;.LGO3; LGO9; LGO10, December 2001). A high male local government official argues:

Women's low representation as decision makers in local government is either because of culture or women's own choice and decision. Women's marginality in representation is not men's fault, but women's, because they don't want to take a role in government and politics. Women are only interested in social activities rather than in local government. Women's attendance in APDN/IIP

⁴⁹ MP2 refers to member of house representatives at the local level

(Institute for Government's Science) is below 5%. Women who are involved in a political party fail to attend the political party's programs if it requires them to travel away from home for several days. Women said they do not want to leave home because they have to take care of their children and husband and other household activities. So, it is not men who close the opportunity, but it is women who do not want to do something to be equal with men. Women are not comfortable with the harsh situation in politics (LGO2, December 2001).

Thus, using women's acceptance of patriarchal cultural values, local government puts the blame on women's invisibility in local government on women rather than acknowledging that national and local government has discriminated against women, and that there are major cultural obstacles to women's equal participation. Male officials frequently point to the existence of women as president, cabinet minister and some female heads of local government as evidence of the government's political will towards gender equity in Indonesia:

(Researcher): What do you think about women's role in local government?

(Participant): Frankly speaking, I am surprised with this question. I never thought about this issue before since all this time I thought it was normal.

(Researcher): What do you think obstructs women's progress in local government?

(Participant): There should be nothing that hinders women from progressing. But maybe women have psychological obstacles. Women should not only be nagging and demanding too much for their share. Instead they should be active in taking the opportunities and struggling to be equal. If women demand to be treated equally with men, they should placed themselves and behave as men. For example, in household responsibility...believe it or not... it is not men who claim that they should become the head of household. Instead, women always say to men "You are the head of household. Children's school fees are your responsibility". Actually men will be very happy, if they did not have to be the head of household. So...whose sin is this? Maybe we can blame culture and history. But let's go back to the basic system of our country that is democracy. Indonesia is a democratic country. I think no political party restricts women from participating in their party. Whoever wants to come up, s/he will come up. But still there are more men than women in political parties. I don't know whose fault this is. Isn't it because women place themselves so highly? The leader of PDIP (Indonesia Democratic Party) is a woman and she became the President of Indonesia. However, at the lower level, for example in North Sumatra, of 30 seats available for PDI only 2 women are elected as members of parliament.

Whose sin is this? Men are not sinful in this case. Be honest. It is women who do not want to be involved further. What can we say? (LGO1, December 2001).

The above quotations highlight local government's ignorance of the heavy burden women have due to cultural practices and the societal gendered division of work that multiplies women's obligations in traditional productive and reproductive responsibilities. Male local government officials strongly reject accusations that men contribute to women's invisibility in all levels of government through their strong hold on patriarchal cultural values. This rejection is evident in the use of words such as '*...whose sin is it? It is not men's sin*', '*...it's our culture*' which are frequently repeated by male local government officials in explaining women's marginality (LGO2; LGO3; LGO11, December 2001).

Local government's denial of the existence of gender discrimination contributes to its neglect of gender issues. Government officials and members of local parliament rarely discuss gender issues since they do not perceive gender discrimination as existing (MP1; MP2, November 2001; LGO3; LGO5, December 2001; SW, January 2003). A male member of the local parliament provides an explanation for the reason that gender issues have never been discussed by members of parliament in his region as follows: '*There is no gender problem. The more you problematise it, the more you admit that women let themselves be left behind. Our political system does not differentiate between men and women as long as they have the ability to compete and to progress*' (MP1, November 2001). Based on this understanding, since government and local development processes have not been discriminatory to women, the application of gender sensitive indicators in local government policies and programs is impossible because it would be viewed as a form of discrimination to men (LGO1, December 2001).

Interestingly, in the *semiloka* when the existence of women as decision makers was repeated by a local government official in arguing that there was no discrimination against women in Indonesia, it received many challenges from women from NGOs,

community based organisations and even from female local government officials (see Table 3 page 277 and 278). Women argued that the presence of a small number of women as decision makers in Indonesia cannot be used in validating the realisation of gender equity in Indonesia since they are too few in number. Gender equity should not only be viewed by the existence of women as policy makers but also the percentage of women policymakers and representatives in Indonesia as compared to the total population of women in Indonesia. In relation to the argument that there is no gender discrimination since, formally, all positions in government are open to women, women argue that discrimination is not only about limited opportunity but unjust opportunity (SW, January 2003). For example, female local government officials have to put more energy than their male colleagues into competing for a position in local government bureaucracy due to their domestic responsibilities at home. Thus, positive discrimination, in which there are more opportunities for women who work in local government to compete equally with male local government officials, should be applied (SW, January 2003).

Culture, which shapes household relations, significantly influences the achievements of women who work in local government bodies. The narrative from a female local government official below highlights how household relations play a significant role in influencing the achievements of women who work in local government:

I started to work in local government at a low level. I always took the time to care for my children in the morning. My house was situated close to the office where I worked. Every day I had my activities scheduled. I first attended the daily official ceremony. Then I shopped and went back home to bathe my children and feed them. After finishing all these activities, I went back to the office. At 12 I came home to have lunch with my husband and then went back to work. Now, I am the head of a kelurahan (urban locality). All this time my husband supported me. My husband is a civil servant too. Prior to becoming a Lurah (head of urban locality) I informed my husband that being a head of village is not easy since I would have to work 24 hours. My husband did not allow me to quit the job. He said "Don't quit your job. It is not easy to find a job now. What will you do if I die first and our children have grown up?" Now my 5 children have grown up. We share household activities. I do the shopping and cooking, my children wash and iron their own clothes, and my husband takes care of the children and sometimes does the ironing. My husband can cook, but I realise my 'kodrat' as woman can't be changed. I cook. Housework and child

rearing are women's responsibility. Husbands can only watch over children. We as women should not forget our household responsibilities. I always cook in the morning. Food is our [women's] responsibility. At 8 a.m I have to be in the office. If my house is not under control, I become confused. I can't work. What is it for that we speak in public if our house is in mess and neglected? I don't see that my being a woman obstructs my achievement as a Lurah (LGO13, December 2001).

Kodrat (women's nature and destiny) is frequently used by male and female local government officials to justify their acceptance to the 'normality' of the gendered household relations. By and large female local government officials highly appreciate their reproductive roles in giving birth and breastfeeding as *kodrat* (LGO5; LGO6; LGO9; LGO10, December 2001), rather than as obstruction to their achievement as local government officials. A female local government official who is a head of a local government's empowerment section argued:

Giving birth and breast feeding are not obstacles to women. It shows we are more capable than men. While I was a Camat (head of a sub district) I used to leave home very early in the morning...at 1 or 2 in the morning to check whether the people who were responsible for the security of our locality did their job. My driver is my son or daughter. Women are more accurate, persuasive and administratively more in order. My sexuality as a woman is beneficial in performing my role as a Camat, especially in solving violence in the community. Considering I am a woman, men are more respectful towards me (LGO17, December 2001).

While giving birth, breastfeeding and menstruation are natural to women (*kodrat*), this *kodrat* has been extended to include other housework activities, thus emphasising that women's appropriate place is at home. For example, men's reluctance in allowing their wife to further her career outside home seems to be determined by the consideration that it will threaten the fulfilment of the interests and needs of other household members as well as reducing their comfort since women will not have time to fulfil their perceived extended *kodrat* responsibilities. A male contends:

When will she serve me? When will we meet? If my wife is the head of PKK nobody will take good care of the children...It is not because men want to exploit women, but women are the ones who can breastfeed the babies. Mother's milk is the best food for children...so it is for the best for the family (LG1, December 2001).

I prefer my wife not to have a high position which requires much of her time. I prefer her as my partner. My wife's tea is different from the tea which is made by the housemaid (LGO3, December 2001).

In the *semiloka*, local government officials described men's reluctance to let their wives further their career as 'men's weakness', thus arguing for the willingness of men to let women progress as a solution to this problem (SW, January 2003). The term 'men's weakness' was strongly opposed by the CBO/NGO group which argued that women's marginality in local governance was based more on 'men's uneasiness to accept women to progress rather than men's weakness (SW, January 2003). The willingness of men as a strategy which was proposed by the local government group was challenged by the CBO/NGO group as reflecting middle class bias which will not be successful if it is to be implemented at the grassroots level. A leader of a CBO thus argued:

Men's willingness is only applicable for people who are economically well off. My husband will not be willing to let me go out of the home. It's about how to make our husband aware that I have other interests than on kitchen, bedroom and bathroom. It should be about raising consciousness of men and women (SW, January 2003).

This quotation suggests the urgency of both men and women to take an active role in gender consciousness raising in order to ensure the realisation of gender equity in local governance.

The academic group raised an interesting gender issue at the household level by pointing out men's different attitudes to their wife and daughter. While some men are reluctant to let their wives further their career, they are more supportive and proud of their daughters' achievements. For example, a father will encourage and provide facilities for a daughter allowing her to study to achieve a grade as high as possible. In the *semiloka*, my position as a wife, a mother and a PhD student was used to justify that there is no discrimination against women and that women's achievements are more influenced more by their own capability and interests. This argument was strongly rejected by a head of local government agency by arguing that my case is exceptional and by providing many examples and cases, including her experiences as a local

government official, she argued that the majority of women experience huge challenges in furthering their career due to the widespread patriarchal culture in community and in local government (SW, January 2003). This discussion highlights the urgency to explore power relations at the household and public level in discussing gender dimensions of local government.

While female local government officials value their reproductive roles, some male local government officials perceive women's reproductive roles as constraining women from becoming effective decision makers (LGO1; LGO2; LGO3, December 2001). A male local government official who was previously involved in TPP2W described challenges from his colleagues when he suggested that there should be more women as decision makers in local government: *'Your suggestion to increase the numbers of women in decision making positions will add problems since it will be difficult to ask them to attend meetings at night, especially when they get pregnant'* (LGO2, December 2001). Another male local government official while arguing that women working in local government have equal productivity to men, thus local government should value their reproductive roles, described the difficulty he experienced in including women in his work : *'If I invite women to work overtime...at night time with me, it will create gossips. I will replace women with men if it comes to work at night. We are still Eastern people with our own culture'* (LGO3, December 2001).

While, as I have mentioned above, all female local government officials accept and value their *kodrat* as women, they differ in their perception of the extended interpretation to *kodrat*. Some of them perceive and accept the extended interpretation of women's *kodrat* as a natural implication of women's reproductive roles which women have to be responsible for. On the other hand, some female local government officials strongly challenge this kind of interpretation by arguing that it will obstruct women from enhancing their career as a local government official. As a female head of women's empowerment section argued:

If we want emancipation, we should not try to ask for dispensation, except for issues which relate directly to our kodrat as women such as giving birth, breast feeding and menstruation. For example, she should not be saying that because I

am a woman it is not appropriate for me to go out of home at night to do my duty or that I can't come to the office on time in the morning since I have to cook for my husband first, still you want to be a civil servant. Do your work according to the rule. Don't use that old perception that woman have to cook, so that a woman who work in local government has to cook before she goes to work. As long as a woman has that kind of attitude, she will never get important position in local government because there are many others who can work without many complaints. So why look for person who always complains? That kind of woman will be left out (LGO17, December 2001).

Acceptance of the extended interpretation of women's *kodrat* serves as evidence that women who work in local government are yet to be ready to empower themselves. A female local government official took me around local government's office where she works and pointed to the empty chairs which, she explained, as belong to women.

Are women ready? [for full participation in the civil service] Those who go home before working hours are finished are women. They come late to the office because they have to do housework first and drop their children to school. They go home earlier because they have to pick up their children and prepare food for them (LGO10, December 2001).

The strong patriarchal value among male local government officials significantly complicates the realisation of gender mainstreaming in North Sumatra. It leads us to question the readiness of local government in mainstreaming gender in its policies and programs. As a female local government succinctly argues:

Local government is yet to be ready to implement gender empowerment. Male local government officials demand their rights but deny their responsibilities in housework. They are not gender sensitive since they do not want to share housework with their wife. For example, they do not want to pick up and drop off children from and to school because they consider it as women's obligation. With this kind of attitude, how can they disseminate gender equity to the community? (LGO10, December 2001).

Financial barriers

Gender insensitivity and local government's denial of the existence of problems women face in participating in and benefiting from local development contributes to the lack of or limited budget to women's empowerment programs. The structure of North Sumatra's regional budget is yet to reflect gender sensitivity as can be seen in the

decline of expenditures for women from Rp.220,471,967 (1998/1999) to Rp.160,552,878 (1999/2000) (BPS 2001) which constitutes less than 1% of the total actual expenditure of this region. This percentage in fact becomes smaller since this budget is also used to cover health, social welfare, child and adolescent programs (LGO1; LGO3; LGO4, December 2001).

The formation of units for women's empowerment faced challenges from local government and members of House of Representative (DPRD) at the provincial and local level. They based their challenges on two main arguments. Firstly, local government has provided an adequate budget for women as it has been integrated in development programs and projects in general. Secondly, due to the implementation of Law 22/1999, local revenue is limited therefore local government has to prioritise more urgent issues. At the municipal level the establishment of a women's empowerment section was at first rejected by DPRD since it was not considered urgent due to the budget constraints and because it was asserted that women's interests are served through integrated development programs. It was only after women criticised and strongly argued for the urgency of a women's focal point in municipal government due to the differences between men's and women's experiences and interests, that it was established (LGO5, December 2001; NGO13, November 2001). The difficulty in establishing a bureau for women's empowerment is admitted by a high local government official. He says:

Just to form a women's empowerment bureau we have to struggle hard. It depends on budget. If it takes form as an agency the fund will be larger since it will have its own office, equipment, etc. Well, the institution for women's empowerment has always not had without enough authority (LGO2, December 2001).

Local government officials perceive that the provincial government of North Sumatra has had concern for women's empowerment programs by providing a large amounts of money (Rp.500 million for year 2001/2002) for women's empowerment programs in the province (LGO4, January 2003). This amount was the rollover from the previous budget for the women's empowerment section which was under the Youth, Sports and Women's bureau. WEB faced difficulty in effectively using the allocated budget since

local government required WEB to use this budget in a six month period while WEB itself was only just established. Moreover, this budget was only supposed to be used for disseminating information about the WEB, but it had to be used to cover the increasing expenses of the women's bureau (LGO16, January 2003).

While in some areas women have successfully struggled for the establishment of women's focal points, in most regions in North Sumatra these women's focal points have yet to be established. In Dairi, for example, the formation of a bureau for women's empowerment was rejected by DPRD and Bupati with arguments that local government had limited funds due to low local revenue and there were other more urgent priorities than the establishment of a women's focal point (MP2, November 2001). The use of a limited local government budget in justifying local government's rejection of establishing women's focal points is challenged by women:

The fund for women's empowerment is very small but how come in other areas they have large funds? For example, there are more funds for drinking water for members of local parliament and head of local government housing. This means they did not care about women (NGO5, November 2001).

Thus, gender empowerment programs are yet to be high on the local government agenda. When women's interests compete with the interests of others in using local government resources, women's interests are still the least considered by local government. The provision of budget for gender empowerment programs along with continuous monitoring of the budget is thus urgent to ensure local government's commitment to women's empowerment programmes.

Badan Perwakilan Desa (Village Representative Body): A Strategic Site for Women's Political Participation?

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Law 22/1999 on decentralisation focuses heavily on devolving power to local government institutions and legislative bodies but is yet to pay enough attention on how to enhance popular participation and to ensure local government accountability which is very important if decentralisation in Indonesia is to result in a just and democratic society. Among the various levels of local government,

the village level seems to allow greater opportunity for participatory democracy as it is the only level of local government where *kepala desa* (head of village) and VRB (*Badan Perwakilan Desa* or “Village Representative Body”) are elected directly by the community. Based on chapter 107 of law 22/1999, VRB together with the head of village, produce *Perdes* (*Peraturan desa* or Village regulations) and APBDesa (Village Government Budget). Also, based on chapter 104 of law 22/1999 members of the village community through their elected representatives in the VRB (village council), have the power to monitor and control the implementation of village regulations, budget, and head of village decisions. Thus, the head of village is accountable to the village community through VRB.

Women’s groups and NGOs responded enthusiastically to the formation of VRB. By and large, they consider the formation of VRB as a concrete and strategic site for the enhancement of women’s political participation at the village level (Andi and Zailani 2002; NGO5; CB04, December 2002). The strategic position of VRB in village governance is explained by a member of a community based organisations as follows:

VRB is a representative body which monitors the performance of the village head. It also determines the village head’s position and produces legislation regarding village government. I would rather be elected as member of VRB rather than as head of village since it is the most important institution in our village. VRB determines what our village will be (CBO7, December 2002).

Considering the power that VRB has in village governance, it could serve as a strategic vehicle for women’s empowerment in the way that: 1. It opens up space for women to be elected as village representatives; 2. It provides room for women to experience, learn and extend their participation to formal politics; 3. It provides mechanisms through which women may voice their interests and influence decision making at the village level in ensuring that women equally participate and benefit from the village governance and its resources; 4. It does not require women to be away from their environment; 5. Women have the knowledge and expertise to contribute to VRB due to their familiarity in fulfilling household daily needs and community affairs.

A question develops regarding whether VRB is a strategic site for village women to influence policymaking in their village. It is important now to discuss in detail the constraints/challenges for women to be elected as members of VRB and women's responses to potentials and challenges of VRB.

Challenges Facing Women in Becoming Members of VRB

Despite the great potential and relevance for women to participate in VRB, women have been marginalised in all election stages to the VRB. From the dissemination of information about VRB, to the registration, nomination, election and post election of VRB, village women face challenges and obstructions which hinder them from effectively participating in VRB.

Although local government is yet to be effective in disseminating VRB to members of the community in general, it is particularly insensitive and awkward with respect to women. A member of a community based organisation remarks:

Government does not do well in disseminating information about VRB...that's why the community did not respond and were not concerned about the VRB - there is a lack of information. While government invited men to the VRB election, women were being deprived of the opportunity to become involved (CBO3, November 2001).

Local government's gender insensitivity in disseminating information about VRB has discouraged women from participating as candidates in the election of VRB. A member of SPI says:

The official from PMD (Pembangunan Masyarakat Desa or village community development) who disseminated VRB to us told us that education is a very important requirement to be elected as a member of VRB and said that it is very difficult to become head of village. Well, if formal education is the prime requirement, we can't become members of VRB because we don't have formal education. We do not dare to participate in the election (CBO1, November 2001).

Understanding that these women had received incorrect information about VRB, I informed them that based on Law 22/1999, formal education is not the prime requirement, but rather all members of the village community have the right and

opportunity to be elected as members of VRB as long as they are elected by the community. Thus, a gender sensitive approach in disseminating information about VRB is urgent in encouraging women to participate in VRB elections. As a leader of a community based organisation notes '*We discussed your information about VRB. Finally we decided that we have to participate in VRB elections because it is important*' (CBO4, November 2001).

There has been gender discrimination in the dissemination of information about VRB as well in the election of members of VRB. Whilst the local government invites participation of *tokoh agama* (religious leaders), *tokoh adat* (customary leaders), and youth organisations, which are mostly dominated by men, women are seldom invited to participate in dissemination of information about VRB and elections. In some regions, some men were elected as members of VRB merely based on their position as religious and customary leaders (CBO4; NGO5, November 2001). A leader of a women's CBO remarks:

Village government only gives invitations to the head of household...I had never been invited formally by government but I always come to the meetings. VRB issues [supposedly] do not involve women. The invitation is closed. The criteria in choosing VRB is based mostly on wealth or position in religious or community organisations (CBO4, November 2001).

By inviting only the head of household, who based on Indonesian marriage law is the man, to attend the VRB election, village government has restricted women from the opportunity to be elected as a VRB member. A female teacher in one of my research sites explained how the head of the village asked her to distribute invitations to her students and to inform students that only their fathers were invited to VRB elections (NGO11, November 2001). Where women are invited to VRB elections they are only there as voters, not to be elected (CBO4; NGO5, November 2001).

In most cases, discrimination against women takes a more disguised form, such as late or lack of information on VRB election dates, times and venues. While not directly restricting women from participating in VRB elections, this disguised form of discrimination effectively obstructs women from participating in VRB election whether

as voters or as candidates of VRB. Due to the poor information, women do not know that an election is taking place (CBO4; CBO7; NGO2; NGO5, November 2001). It is only after the election is over that they learnt that their VRB members have been elected (NGO5, November 2001). Lateness in gaining information on VRB elections contributes to women's lateness in fulfilling the required documents which are needed for eligibility as a candidate. A leader of SPI explains the difficulty she experienced in participating in VRB election in her village:

When we learned that there was to be VRB election we met the head of the VRB election committee. We asked him whether there was still opportunity for us to register in the election. Since he told us that we still had time, we tried our best to provide the required documents...at least we had our photo which was one of the requirements. Difficulty occurred when we asked for the form to be filled in. They said we can get the form from the head of the village office. We went there, but they said it was in the sub-district's office. We went to sub-district's office. They said the man who was responsible for the forms took them in to the field. We wondered why he would take the papers to the field. The sub-district's official said "Unfortunately, you have been too late to register" (CBO3, November 2001).

Women's lateness in fulfilling the required documents is frequently used by the VRB election committee to justify the rejection of women who nominate themselves (NGO5; CBO1; CBO2; CBO3, November 2001). Women perceived that the lateness in disseminating information on VRB election to women is 'intentional' rather than 'incidental', thus, preventing women from being elected as VRB members. A member of a NGO, who strongly argues for this intentionality of village government to leave women behind in the VRB elections, pointed out that prior to VRB election, members of this NGO conducted a public hearing at the local parliament demanding parliament to inform the heads of sub-districts to disseminate information about the election widely and early to members of community including women (NGO5, November 2001). Despite the promise which members of DPRD made to fulfil this demand, VRB elections were still conducted without informing women about the time and venue of the elections.

In some villages procedures to be nominated for a VRB election were particularly complicated for women. A member of community based organisation describes challenges she experienced in the VRB election at her village as follows:

The head of the VRB committee election did not give me the form which has to be filled in order for eligibility to be nominated as a candidate in VRB elections. This was even though I have completed all needed requirements. I knew some people were given the form even though they did not register themselves as candidates. I sent a letter to the committee, but I was ignored. It was only after I insisted and threatened them that I would report them to a higher level of government that they gave me the form (CBO10, November 2001).

These hidden barriers are effective mechanisms in eliminating women from participating and nominating themselves in VRB elections since it is difficult to prove that the VRB election process has discriminated against women.

At the community level, the widespread perception of women's domesticity within the community contributes to the exclusion of women from participating in VRB election. In one village where women were invited to VRB elections, there was protest from other voters that women could not enter the room and participate in VRB elections because women's place is at home doing housework (NGO5, November 2001). A male research participant who was the husband of a head of village (he told me in front of his wife that his wife was elected as head of village due to his wealth and position in the community) strongly rejected women as members of VRB by arguing '*Why should women be in VRB? They are very busy at home. Women have no time while VRB is very important since it is the parliament body of the village*' (MMC⁵⁰, November 2001). Women's obligations and priority in fulfilling their domestic responsibilities rather than attending VRB elections have frequently been pointed out as evidence of women's lack of interest in politics (MP1; MP2, November 2001; LGO13, December 2001). By not coming to VRB related activities, women lose their opportunity to be elected as VRB members.

⁵⁰ MMC refers to male member of community.

The widespread gender biased stereotype of women within the community significantly obstructs women from being elected as members of VRB. Women are characterised as gossipers, emotional, and lacking interest, knowledge and capability in leading and making good decisions regarding village governance. This stereotype puts psychological constraints on women. By and large women are reluctant to participate and be nominated as VRB members since they are afraid that other members of the community in their village will not accept their nomination and will not elect them because they are woman (CBO1; CBO2; NGO5; NGO11, November 2001).

Women need courage and support to be elected as VRB members since they face greater challenges in entering the formal political arena which many members of the community, perceive as men's domain. With the national government's rejection of establishing a quota for women, women are left unsupported and unprotected, thus having to struggle by themselves. At this point, NGOs, community based organisations and women's organisations can play strategic roles in empowering women. The enhancement of women's self-confidence and skills, and the establishment of networks are crucial in protecting women from threats which occur in their attempt to assert their rights as members of the community. They also increase women's capability in running for the election as members of VRB effectively. The case study of HAPSARI/SPI in Deli Serdang (also discussed in Chapter Seven) demonstrates how women, community-based organisations and NGOs through diverse strategies may effectively collaborate to make the most of regional autonomy in enhancing women's participation in village governance.

VRB in Deli Serdang: Striving Towards Gender Equity

In the previous chapter I have described how SPI and HAPSARI work together to raise women's consciousness and confidence in participating in community development. During my first research visit (2001) SPI and HAPSARI were yet to have much interest in VRB elections due to their focus on consciousness raising and breaking women's

silence. At that time, this strategy was considered to be more important than VRB elections since the majority of village women lacked courage and capability in voicing their interests due to cultural constraints as well as challenges from the community and local government. Leaders of SPI and HAPSARI perceived that it was not yet the time for women to participate in VRB since they were still at the stage of strengthening their organisations and learning about village government. A leader of SPI notes:

We have not talked about VRB yet. We need to manage and strengthen our organisation and its members. We will wait until we can provide women who really have the capability for VRB. We still lack human resources. But if the VRB process is open we will participate. It is still difficult for us with this situation...being threatened by the possibility of being caught by police, some of our members are so frightened that they hide their blouse which has SPI written on it. SPI will participate in VRB elections if the process is open and transparent. But if the process is closed...we will have to think it over (CBO4, November 2001).

There seemed to have been a shift of interest in VRB elections by SPI and HAPSARI when I arrived in 2002 to conduct the second stage of my field research. At this time, HAPSARI and SPI perceived regional autonomy as a strategic political avenue that should be used by women to enhance their participation and control in village governance (NGO1; CBO2, December 2002). They argued that regional autonomy, if responded to well, will provide room for synergy between women and village government. Therefore, at the district level, SPI cooperates with the village community development bureau in disseminating information and conducting discussions on VRB among women at the village level. Through these activities SPI intensively disseminates information about women's right to be elected as members of VRB.

The approaches HAPSARI and SPI use in empowering women through consciousness raising and breaking women's silence work strategically since they enhance women's self confidence and the ability to speak which are very important to women's success in competing for seats in VRB. Discussions and training conducted by HAPSARI and SPI equip members of SPI with knowledge and skills about village governance which enhances their competitiveness in the VRB elections. Through their involvement in SPI, women have more experiences in interacting with the village government and

community. Moreover, HAPSARI and SPI provide support networks for women who participate in VRB elections. These have been very useful in assisting SPI members who wish to be nominated in VRB elections to deal with problems they might face in their nomination. When I did my research in 2002, many SPI members had been elected as members of VRB in their villages.

Although the percentage of women elected as members of VRB is low compared to the total population of female village members (see table 4 page 307), SPI and HAPSARI's achievement in assisting women's election as members of VRB should be considered as politically impressive considering the state and local government do not establish a quota for women in the village council body, nor does the government provide any political education for women. The 30% quota for women in political parties, which was proposed by women's organisations and NGOs, was rejected by government and political parties on 28/11/02 (Kompas 29/11/01). The ability of SPI members to be elected as members of VRB despite the huge challenges originating from the community and village government and lack of facilities from government reveals women's resilience and capability of competing in formal politics. It also highlights the achievements of SPI and HAPSARI in transforming women's perception that formal politics is only men's domain. They have shown that it is a domain in which women and men may participate to pursue their interests:

Women's readiness to participate in registration and election of VRB is the first indicator of the rise of women's political consciousness. The capability of women as members of VRB should not become a problem since there will be a continuous learning process through SPI and the dynamics of village governance (Andi and Zailani 2002).

HAPSARI and SPI continue their support of women in the post election time of VRB. Recently, facilitated by HAPSARI and SPI, 33 female members of VRB from 25 villages and 10 sub-districts in Deli Serdang formed a forum called *Forum BPD Perempuan Deli Serdang* (FVRB-DS or forum for female VRB members). The former leader of SPI Perbaungan acts as the chief executive of this forum. FVRB-DS serves as a communication forum for female VRB members in Deli Serdang. The forum provides room for these women to share their experiences. It aimed at the issuance of village

regulations which are responsive to women's interests and needs. Therefore, FVRB-DS provides training for female VRB members on issues such as village government, the production of village regulations, roles, rights and obligations of members of VRB. In expanding its network and disseminating information about its programs and activities, FVRB-DS uses an electronic newsletter which is titled '*sapa si mbok*' (who are you).

Table 4: The Composition of Male and Female Members of VRB in Deli Serdang

No	Sub district	Villages	Male	Female ⁵¹	Percentage of female to male
1	Tanjung Morawa	24	258	21	7.53%
2	Pantai Cermin	9	88	9	9.28%
3	Batang Kuis	10	103	5	4.63%
4	Perbaungan	25	185	24	11.4%
5	Lubuk Pakam	6	70	6	7.89%
6	Sei Rampah	24	214	18	7.76%
7	Pagar Merbau	13	84	9	9.68%

Source: Adapted from SPI 2002

Considering the urgency to understand difficulties women in Deli Serdang face in accessing VRB, FVRB-DS has conducted research on VRB by visiting 196 villages and nine sub districts in Deli Serdang. From 196 villages visited, data on female and male VRBs are available in 126 villages. This research reveals gender inequity in VRB with 1126 of VRB members being men and only 98 women. Table 5 (page 307), which is based on SPI and HAPSARI's research on VRB in 5 villages in Deli Serdang,

⁵¹ Not all of women elected in VRB are members of SPI Deli Serdang.

highlights the widespread nature of patriarchal culture which significantly obstructs women's achievement in participating in VRB elections. Interestingly, the perception that 'politics is men's world' is pointed out as an obstacle to women's achievement in VRB election in all these villages.

Table 5: The result of research on VRB in five villages in Deli Serdang

No	Name of village	Male	Female	Obstacles
1	Buntu Bedimbar Kec.Tj.Morawa	12	1	-Information did not reach women -Politics and VRB are still considered as men's world -Women are not involved in village meetings
2	Celawan Kec. Pantai Cermin	12	-	-Respect to men (women prioritise men) -Politics is considered as men's world -Women are afraid to nominate themselves as VRB candidates
3	Bogak Besar Kec.Teluk Mengkudu	13	-	-Strong culture (women need not to be involved in politics since it is men's world) -Women were not involved in the election day
4	Sukasari Kec.Perbaungan	12	1	-Women did not feel the need to participate in village decision making -VRB is only for men
5	Pegajahan	11	2	-Patriarchal culture (politics is men's world) -No need for women's

				involvement in decision making
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Source: HAPSARI/SPI 2003

In avoiding the possibility of female VRB members being used as proxies by other male members of VRB and to enhance women's voice and capacity to voice women's interests and needs through VRB, FVRB-DS, facilitated by HAPSARI/SPI, conducted training about village governance for female VRB members. It was attended by 26 female members of VRB from 25 villages, and 9 sub districts in Deli Serdang. In this training female VRB members were given information about local government regulations, regional autonomy and other related information on the roles and position of VRB in village governance. The trainers were included people from HAPSARI, a female NGO activist from Java, and a male member of an NGO.

In the training, female members of VRB in Deli Serdang shared their experiences in participating in VRB elections and in becoming VRB members in their village. The training highlighted the fact that motivations to participate in VRB elections differ among female VRB members. There seems to be differences of motivation in running for election between women who were used to participating in organisations and those who did not join or participate in organisations. Most female VRB who previously did not participate in organisation expressed that they actually did not have any intention or interest to be nominated in being members of VRB. While these women were at first reluctant to participate, the money (as members of VRB they expect to receive a salary) and flexibility of time promised by people who persuaded them to participate have encouraged these women to be nominated in the election.

At first I did not have any interest to participate in VRB election as nominee. It would just disturb my nap time. A candidate in the head of village election asked me to be willing to be nominated in VRB elections since he needed my support to win his election as head of village. He told me that being a member of VRB will not take much of my time because all I have to do is attend the VRB meeting (VRBD, December 2002).

This tendency is dangerous since women are merely elected as members of VRB as proxies to serve political interests of males rather than serving women's interests. Some

of these women expressed their intention to withdraw from VRB since they perceived their position as VRB members had taken much of their time. However, they changed their mind after they were reminded by trainers and other female VRB that they should not waste the trust their voters gave to them and that their participation in VRB is crucial for women and their village development (VRBD, December 2002).

Despite the possibility that female VRB members are being used merely as proxies, decentralisation opens the opportunity for women to participate in decision making in their village. Interestingly, although national government does not obligate the reservation of a quota of seats for women, there is a case in Deli Serdang in which the village decided that there should be female representatives as members of their VRB. Due to this decision, two women were elected as members of VRB. In other villages women were elected because there were not enough candidates who ran for the VRB (VRBD, December 2002).

Women's involvement in organisations contributed to their success in VRB elections. Apart from a small number of the elected female members of VRB who had not participated in organisations previously, most of the women who were elected have been involved in organisations such as SPI, NGO, PKK Family Welfare Development Program and youth religious groupings. By and large, women who are involved in SPI community organisations participate in VRB elections based on their own willingness and consciousness to develop their village and to represent women's voice in decision making in their village. Encouragement from SPI significantly contributes to women's confidence and capability to participate in the election. A member of SPI notes:

Due to the information I got from SPI regarding the importance of women's participation in VRB, I nominated myself in VRB elections. My husband trembled because he was not ready for the consequences. I have the courage because the organisation taught us that we have the right to speak. My photo which I used in my campaign was torn. I thought about withdrawing, but my friends in the organisation encouraged and supported me so I was elected (CBO4, December 2002).

Despite diversity of motivation in the way women were elected as members of VRB, there is similarity among them that household relations significantly influence women's

motivation in participating in VRB elections. Gaining one's husband's permission is crucial even when women feel ready to be nominated as VRB members (CBO4; NGO5; NGO9). A woman who had been elected as a VRB member proudly described her husband's contribution in her election: *'My husband supported me. He even rented a becak (tricycle) and campaigned around our village for me. This really lifted up my spirit in participating in the VRB election'* (VRBD, December 2002).

Perwiridan, which is a religious grouping for Moslem women, as discussed in Chapter Six, is a strategic source of voters for women who participate as candidate in VRB election since most village women participate in *perwiridan*. Most female candidates of VRB campaigned to this religious grouping to gain support for their election. Candidates who have established a relationship with *perwiridan* prior to the election, are the ones who take the most advantage of this religious grouping. A female member of VRB, who is a graduate from IAIN (an Islamic tertiary institution), described how the *perwiridan* members asked to nominate her as a candidate in VRB elections. Members of *perwiridan* trust and respect her due to her knowledge on Islamic teachings. She used to discuss and help these women to solve their problems especially in facing domestic violence. These women urged her to participate in the VRB election with expectations that as VRB member she might represent their interests and help them solve and represent their problems especially around the issue of domestic violence which frequently occurs in that village (VRBD, December 2002).

Thus, in a strong patriarchal community, women's involvement in religious groupings and their knowledge of religious teachings serve as an alternative source of legitimation which they can use to gain acceptance and support from other community members. A young single woman who has been elected as VRB member notes:

I didn't know that there was VRB elections in our village. The committee for the VRB election had been formed without notification to the community. I accidentally met with my friend who was involved in an NGO. This is how I found out about the election. I went to the head of committee. Women are not prohibited from participating in the election, however, the information was late. Moreover, I lacked self confidence because as I know, the more family we have, the greater number of votes we will get. I have no family here. I don't know who

my voters were. I didn't campaign because it was too late. But I am involved actively in Moslem youth group. I think that's why the community trusts me. Although some members of the community feel strange about my election because they consider me too young, most of the community supported me (VRBD, December 2002).

In general, female VRB members point out the lack of knowledge about VRB roles and obligations among community members and village officials as problems which prevent VRB from performing its functions effectively (VRBD, December 2002). Due to the ineffective dissemination of information about VRB, most members of the community as voters do not understand what VRB is for and its roles and power. While community members were invited to attend VRB elections, there was little information about the council's roles. In many villages, members of the community still report to the village or hamlet head rather than to members of VRB who are their representatives. VRB members still do not have the courage to speak out, feeling inferior/subordinate to the village head. This situation increases the power of village heads and contributes to the VRB's ineffectiveness in performing its roles.

The experiences of women as VRB members differ across villages. All female VRB members whom I interviewed mentioned that since they were elected as VRB members, they have always been invited to VRB meetings in their village. Some female members of VRB stated there is no gender discrimination in their VRB since they are given the same opportunity as men to speak (VRBD, December 2002). One female VRB member criticised VRB in her village for being gender insensitive since in adjusting to men's available time, this VRB frequently conducts meeting at night. It was hard for this woman to attend VRB meetings when invitations were given to her at short notice which left her with no time to look for a person to take care her three young children. Other women point to the difficulties they face in voicing women's interests in their VRB meetings. *We have to be very careful and wise in incorporating women's interests in VRB meetings since some of the male members of VRB in our village are very fanatical and conservative (VRBD, December 2002).*

Female VRB members seemed to have specific interests around women's issues. Some female members of VRB expressed their preference to be involved in the women's empowerment section of VRB so that they may serve women's interests better and also because they have knowledge and interests in this issue (VRBF). Domestic violence and children's education received much attention from female VRB members. Women as members of VRB were also more responsive and understanding of women's interests and needs. A female VRB member argues for the urgency of village government to give more attention to women's reproductive health, such as cervical cancer, since this important issue has been neglected by local government in its previous programs which only emphasised mothers and children's health.

However, female VRB members cannot be perceived as a cohesive and united group with similar interests. Construction of power and fragmentation at the community level and within village government significantly influences women's interests. For example, the three female VRB members in a village in Deli Serdang are in conflict with each other since they are divided into three main groups. This VRB cannot perform its functions because of the conflicts that emerge between its members in which one group supports the village head who was considered as supporting the legacy of the New Order, while another group wants to destroy him and the third group does not care one way at the other. Thus, female VRB members should be cautious not to be co-opted into power struggles which dilute their effectiveness in voicing women's interests. Gender training and support networks for female VRB members, as has been facilitated by HAPSARI and SPI, are very important in raising consciousness, enhancing the capability of female VRB members and in creating solidarity among these women. This is crucial should female VRB members want to voice women's interests effectively.

Conclusion

This chapter sets out to explore the dynamic interaction between women and local government in North Sumatra. It has done so by examining the structural, institutional and political changes decentralisation brings to women in North Sumatra. Devolution of

power from central to local government offers both opportunities and threats for women at the local level.

Decentralisation opens up room for grassroots women and women in the bureaucracy to enhance their political participation. By enhancing women's participation there is a possibility that policy is more gender sensitive and may serve the specific needs and interests of women, while at the same time creating a sense of ownership of local government development programs. However, changing the structure and institution of local government does not automatically change the culture of local government bureaucracy. Despite the establishment of a women's empowerment bureau and sections in local government and the VRB, patriarchal culture in the local government institutions and communities serves as a major impediment to the effectiveness of women's focal points and grassroots women's political participation in VRB.

Women who are elected as members of VRB have to struggle to keep up with their male counterparts in several ways. Firstly, they are outnumbered by men, secondly their knowledge and experiences of local governance is limited, and thirdly they have been constrained by cultural norms which assume that housework is women's main responsibility. By and large, female VRB members point to the urgency to increase women's knowledge, information and capacity building, in order for female VRB members to be able to carry out their roles effectively. Thus, capacity building for female VRB members is urgent in preventing them from being captured as proxies of their husband or other powerful persons.

This chapter has argued for the significance of gender relations and power structures at the local level in understanding the gender differential impact of decentralisation. Devolving power to local government is not automatically conducive for the creation of gender sensitive local governance. The implementation of Law No.22/1999 and national policy on women's empowerment is vulnerable to fragmentation and contestation of local power. The structural, cultural and financial barriers to women's empowerment

focal points at the local level reveal how national policies on women's empowerment may find challenges and subversions in their implementation at the local level.

Hence, the implementation of decentralisation must be built on the experiences of both men and women and by recognising and incorporating the differences of these experiences across regions. In order for decentralisation to actualise gender equity, there needs to be transformation of people's attitudes and continuous monitoring and evaluation as to its outcomes on women. The case of VRB in Deli Serdang reveals how by collaborating, grassroots women, CBOs and NGOs, may effectively guard the processes of regional autonomy so that it will equally serve the interests and needs of men and women in North Sumatra.

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSION

Introduction

This study has set out to explore and identify problems and strategies for engendering local governance in Indonesia by looking specifically at the North Sumatra case. In this final chapter I will summarise the main points that have been made in earlier chapters, before drawing out key findings and lessons learned.

Summary

In Chapter One I established the urgency of exploring the engendering of local governance since gender relations have been largely ignored in local governance and good governance discourse and practice. After explaining the relevance of local governance to the quality of women's lives, Chapter One argued that the invisibility and marginality of women in local governance is not caused by women's passivity but rather is due to the intertwining of gendered constructions of the state, local government and the community. Thus, a focus on women's agency is crucial in examining interactions among diverse stakeholders in local governance since it reveals how local governance is gendered and how women can redefine and reshape gendered processes and structures at the local level in pursuing their interests and needs. Due to the long tradition of the exclusion of women from development planning and the institutionalisation of gender ideology in Indonesia, this chapter stressed the urgency of examining the impact of the implementation of Law 22/1999 on local government and of decentralisation on women's lives. Ideally, this law should be responsive to and serve the diverse interests of men and women.

Chapters Two and Three discussed theoretical debates on citizenship, governance, good governance, local governance, decentralisation, power, participation and empowerment.

All of these concepts are not merely technical issues but they imply political values, processes and structures which are gendered. Applying a feminist perspective to these critical concepts in development can highlight and unravel biases which contribute to gendered processes and structures at the local level. For example, while acknowledging that decentralisation could bring local government closer to women, Chapter Two also contended that decentralisation could increase competition over power and resources at the local level and contribute to the maintenance of local patriarchal values at that level which marginalise women.

Poststructuralist feminism, which argues for the multiplicity of spaces, structures and strategies used by women in Third World countries to meet their needs, has been critical in questioning and challenging the danger of the imposition of Western liberal values concerning citizenship, state and good governance on women in Third World countries (Lister, 1997; Molyneux, 2001; Anandhi, 2002; Bodur and Franceshet, 2002). Rather, post structural feminism suggests that women will have diverse experiences of citizenship, state, and good governance based on the political setting in which they live. For example, whereas in the dominant Western notion of citizenship the private and public spheres are two separate and distinct spheres in which women occupy the private and men dominate the public, women in Third World countries often use these two spheres interchangeably and interdependently to extend their participation and empowerment individually and collectively in influencing and reshaping local governance in pursuing their interests and needs and in addressing their problems.

In Chapter Three I emphasised the significance of incorporating a gendered perspective on participation, power and empowerment since they are crucial in understanding gender inequality in local governance as well as determining complex issues involved with enhancing women's capability in influencing local development processes. Power relations within the household become a critical level of analysis in discussing gender and local governance since households may interchangeably be a source of oppression as well as a site of struggle for women's empowerment whereby women negotiate their identities and invent effective strategies to participate in, and influence local

governance. This chapter highlighted the crucial roles grassroots women's organisations at the local level play in improving the quality of everyday life for women and the community, challenging gender inequality and reconstructing gender relations at the local level through creative strategies. Such strategies address practical and strategic gender interests, through, for example, strengthening women's agency, raising women's self-esteem, consciousness and solidarity in order to achieve personal and collective empowerment of women at the grassroots level. This chapter argued that alternative strategies which are based on women's traditional obligations can empower women more than open and confrontational strategies (Jayawardena, 1986; Marchand, 1995; Wieringa, 1995; Brohman, 1996; Rowlands, 1997; Scheyvens, 1998; Desai, 2000; Rakowski, 2000). Such alternative strategies can minimize threats to women and provide possibilities of establishing a common platform between men and women to struggle for the equal distribution of local resources and services.

Chapter Four on research methodology established the value of a qualitative, participatory and feminist approach to this research in capturing interactions among stakeholders in local governance. The basic philosophy behind my research was that techniques and approaches I used should be empowering, sensitive and avoid exploitation of research participants. Engendering local governance is a sensitive topic since it is perceived by grassroots women as a 'political issue' which may threaten them and their families. Suspicion and fear of women about discussions of local governance required me to establish a close relationship with research participants so that I could build up their trust. Qualitative, participatory, feminist research suited the ethical and political context of my study since it allowed participants to express their feelings, determine topics for discussion, and explain inconsistent/conflicting opinions and deep-seated beliefs, and propose solutions to their problems.

In terms of research techniques, I used a combination of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), in-depth interviews, case studies and participant observation. These techniques allowed me to identify issues of local governance which women considered as important and relevant to them. I used different techniques for different stakeholders by

taking into account diversity among participants. For women's grassroots organisations and NGOs, FGDs were appropriate since they were conducted in spaces and with people familiar to research participants. Participant observation and FGDs were crucial in revealing women's hidden narratives which would be difficult to learn about through surveys or questionnaires. Participant observation contributed to rapport building with participants since they perceived me as part of their group, someone they could trust. Both FGDs and participant observation allowed me to come closer to examining and understanding the realms of women struggling to participate in local governance. These techniques were also empowering since they allowed for the sharing of information and knowledge among research participants, and between participants and me, which contributed to the enhancement of women's consciousness, self-esteem, and confidence. For example, the sharing of information and knowledge on village governance and functions of local government encouraged members of the SPI to participate in the VRB (Village Representative Body) in their villages.

While in the first stage of my fieldwork I used in-depth interviews to gain data from local government officials, in the second stage I found that participatory research was also effective in reaching out and sensitising the 'elite' such as policy makers at the local and provincial level. Consciousness raising among local government officials is very important in terms of my empowering philosophy due to the power and resources they have. This was achieved by holding a *semiloka* (a combined seminar and workshop) which provided room for grassroots women, local government officials and academics to meet and exchange ideas on their perceptions, experiences and aspirations regarding the engendering of local governance. The *semiloka* was critical in convincing policy makers of the urgency of incorporating a gender perspective into local government development policies, structures and processes.

Chapters Five to Eight drew upon data I gained during fieldwork in North Sumatra. These chapters focused on how women acted within given constraining structures in responding to and reshaping gendered relations at the household and local community level. In Chapter Five I described national policies for empowering women in Indonesia

before comparing the gap between policy and practice. This chapter revealed that the state's gendered ideology, which emphasised women's primary roles as wives and mothers, is continuously being strengthened and reproduced to subordinate women and preserve gender inequity in Indonesia. This has complicated the implementation of gender mainstreaming and decentralisation. There was a revitalisation of local patriarchal values which challenged and diverted national policies on gender mainstreaming.

Chapter Six was based on a case study of *perwiridan*, a Moslem women's religious grouping, showing how *perwiridan* can play a significant role in empowering grassroots women. This *perwiridan* provided women with a diversion from their daily routines and chores while also offering psychological healing for women by granting a space in which they could share their feelings and experiences with other women. It allowed women to have time together to reflect on their lives with little interference or threat from other members of the community since the community perceived *perwiridan* as an acceptable and appropriate place for women to gather and learn about religious teachings. Through discussions about their daily lives in relation to religious teachings, women's consciousness was raised and their capability to reinterpret male-biased interpretations of religious teachings was enhanced. Women also extended the values and functions of *perwiridan*, from a space in which to read Quran into an organisation which could fulfil women's, their households' and the community's interests and needs.

Chapter Seven highlighted the significant role of SPI, a grassroots women's community based organisation, in collaboration with HAPSARI as a women-focused NGO in Deli Serdang, in strengthening women's agency to challenge and reconstruct gendered power relations at the local level. SPI advocated alternative strategies such as chilli sauce politics, a term I devised to explain strategies women used to persuade their husbands and to obtain their permission to attend SPI's activities by fulfilling their traditional housework obligations efficiently. For example, women in SPI learn from each other how to make chilli sauce that lasts for a long time so that they have more time to participate in SPI. Another crucial strategy was to encourage women to speak out and

express their feelings thus breaking women's silence. Starting from asking new members to introduce themselves to other SPI members, then encouraging women to discuss household-related issues with their husbands, and later to persuade husbands to share housework, SPI builds up women's self-esteem and confidence to speak up for themselves.

Solidarity among women and collective identity are core components of women's empowerment. A good sense of self-confidence, collective identity and solidarity is crucial in helping women to deal with gossip, criticism, and physical and psychological violence. It can help them to challenge and reconstruct the status quo. SPI made women's identities, roles and contributions become obvious to the community, thus enhancing the community's recognition of women's capability in dealing with not only household issues but also community and public 'political' issues, which have long been perceived as men's sphere. This, in turn, enabled women to demand their rights as equal members of the community in influencing decision making in their village/locality. Participating in SPI enhanced their capability to participate in BPD, which is an important decision making body at the village level.

Chapter Eight discussed gender mainstreaming and decentralisation in North Sumatra. The ineffectiveness of TPP2W, the government's instrument for women's empowerment, in enhancing the quality of women's life in North Sumatra revealed that the imposition of gender mainstreaming policies without considering the local power structures only creates tensions, conflicts of interest, and leads to subversion of national gender mainstreaming policies at the local level. Thus while central government has devolved gender mainstreaming tasks to local government, it has failed to provide it with adequate authority and funds. Most local government officials felt that central government ambitions about gender mainstreaming had been imposed on them, increasing local government's burden.

Decentralisation provides opportunities as well as threats to women's empowerment, hence it does not automatically bring politics closer to women. For example, although

decentralisation allowed for the emergence of mechanisms for women's empowerment at the local level, these newly established structures experienced a number of linked structural, cultural, and financial barriers which complicated the engendering of local governance in North Sumatra. Decentralisation gives consent to greater participation of community members in local governance. However, at the same time it also allows for the revitalisation of local patriarchal values which obstruct women from participating in local governance on an equal footing with men.

Despite overt and covert obstructions to women, women of SPI with their experiences in participating in public activities proactively responded to opportunities provided by decentralisation, such as: strengthening alliances with other civil society groups, participating and competing in the VRB (Village Representative Body), providing information and training which equipped women with knowledge and skills in managing governance in their villages, so that women's voices will be heard in decision-making institutions and their interests and needs will be addressed at the village level.

Findings and Lessons Learned

The Interlocking of Private and Public Patriarchy as an Overarching Constraint on Engendering Local Governance

Case studies of *perwiridan*, SPI and women working in local government revealed the centrality of household relations to discussions of gender and local governance. Despite diversity among women in these three case studies concerning their roles and participation in civic engagement and in formal local government institutions, the influence of gender relationships at the household level was a common thread that determined women's access to and performance in local governance. The patriarchal structures of the community contribute to the disproportionate share of responsibilities in care and housework related activities, communal and traditional obligations that women in North Sumatra have to carry. Thus, women have limited time to be involved in community meetings or other public activities which are influential to local decision

making. Gendered relationships at the household level have obstructed women's capability to participate in local governance in the way that they often undermine women's self-confidence, and instil fear in women of their husbands and of participation in community affairs. *Malu* (shyness) and *takut* (fear) contribute to women's reluctance to speak up in public. While national and local government support enhancing women's life in the public sphere through gender mainstreaming policies and programmes, case studies from North Sumatra (Chapters 6, 7 and 8) reveal that inequity in gender relations at the household level impedes this. Thus household relations deserve central attention in local government policies and programmes since these relations determine the success of the engendering of local governance.

This study found that the interlocking of private and public patriarchy was an overarching obstacle to the engendering of local governance in North Sumatra. Through the production and reproduction of images of 'good' and 'bad' women, women are controlled and subordinated. Despite differences of culture among women who belong to *perwiridan* (Malay) and SPI/HAPSARI (Javanese), the *3-Ur* (*kasur*, *sumur*, *dapur* or bed, bathroom and kitchen) ideology has been adapted and strengthened as if these are basic components of culture which apply to all women. Male-biased interpretations of religion and culture are used to justify these mythical gendered roles. By reminding women of these traditional roles, the community and local government constrain women's autonomy, restrict their mobility, and preserve the marginalisation of women in local governance. Women may participate in activities outside their perceived traditional gender roles as long as they contribute to and benefit the household, community and local governments without challenging existing patriarchal power constructions at all these levels. Creating 'fear' and 'shame' among women through the use of diverse physical, verbal and psychological violence is an effective weapon in enforcing women's traditional identity and roles. Severe physical, political and economic threats, not only to women but also to their families, are used especially when women extend their participation to formal politics as experienced by members of SPI in Deli Serdang, such as when they rejected the head of the regency accountability report, and participated in the VRB elections.

Gender insensitivity in the design and approach to delivering services contributes to the failure of many of local government programs and projects in reaching women as targets. To be effective, local government needs to realise the principles of affordability, gender sensitivity and personal closeness which are crucial in delivering services to grassroots women with low economic capacity and a low level of formal education.

Interaction between grassroots women and local government rarely occurred, and this contributes to local government's gender insensitivity. There are misperception and mistrust between women and local government which obstruct the effectiveness of local government in service delivery. In the absence of local government services to women's interests and needs, local government used *perwiridan* to mobilise rural women as instruments in implementing development programmes, taking over services that local government should deliver to women and the community. Chapters Six and Seven contain much evidence of how women sustain their household and community livelihoods. Women working together to keep their neighbourhood clean and safe, taking care of their household members' health, making transportation to their village easier, were among many of women's contributions. However, due to ignorance or lack of concern about women's multiple burdens, local government frequently misperceives the invisibility and marginality of women in public politics as being due to women's lack of interest and laziness. Local government officials struggle to understand the differences between men's and women's interests and needs, thus they fail to incorporate women's needs in local government agendas and in their approaches in delivering services to women. Thus, gender inequity has emerged from local government's failure to recognise and incorporate women's perceptions and their contributions to the community and the state. Despite women's significant contribution in supporting household livelihoods and community development, women remain excluded from critical decision-making at the local level.

The Power of Grassroots Women's Organisations

The case studies of *perwiridan* in *kelurahan* Melayu and SPI in Deli Serdang suggested that women in North Sumatra tend to be involved more in women's grassroots organisations than in formal political organisations. Although these organisations are not involved directly in formal politics, they contribute significantly to women's empowerment and community development. As I argued in previous chapters, the effectiveness of women's participation in local governance should not be measured merely by their ability to participate in formal local politics; instead it should be measured against the contextual setting in which women live their daily lives. This measurement should consist of women's ability to reshape gendered household relations, as well as social, political, cultural and religious structures which put constraints on them, into factors which are conducive to women's fulfilling their interests and needs. It should also take into account women's perceptions of what constitutes the critical components of their empowerment. Women's participation at the local level, whether in religious groupings and/or in community-based organisations such as SPI, can significantly strengthen women's agency which is very important in reshaping gendered relationships at the household and community level.

Despite a diversity of strategies and approaches used by *perwiridan* and SPI, the household seems to be a critical site which may interchangeably become a source of oppression as well as a site of struggle for women to negotiate their identity and to participate in local governance. While the state, local government and the community use women's perceived traditional gendered roles to subordinate them, consciousness raising in women's gatherings enables them to understand and use their positions as women, wives and mothers, including their sexuality, to negotiate their identity and to extend their participation in influencing decision making at the local level. In the midst of the intertwining of the oppressive structures of the state, patriarchy and poverty, alternative strategies which women in *perwiridan* and SPI use are effective in reshaping local governance. For example, women of SPI raised awareness and built alliances with members of a Moslem youth organisation, who respect them because of their position as mothers, to monitor and demand accountability from village government. Thus,

alternative strategies enable grassroots women to exercise a degree of social power in participating in and influencing local governance.

The religious groupings known as *perwiridan* are one form of organisation in which the majority of women in North Sumatra are engaged. Religious groupings are familiar to both women and local government. Local government and communities are quite accommodating and appreciative of women's participation in religious groupings. As with other forms and instruments of empowerment, there will always be the possibility that religious groupings are co-opted to serve local government interests rather than gender interests/needs. However, in communities where there is limited option for women to participate, grassroots organisations, such as *perwiridan*, which are familiar to and accepted by male members of the community, provide an alternative space for women to be empowered. This minimalises threats to women in organising, thus, contributing to the sustainability of women's empowerment processes and outcomes.

Perwiridan have been empowering to women in the way they provide a relaxed space for women to meet while avoiding harsh criticisms and threats from male members of the community and members of their household. They provide an alternative space for women who are living under strict cultural and religious teachings to share ideas and experiences and reinterpret religion based on their understanding of religious teachings. Women's ability to go out of their home to meet with other women, leave their daily domestic chores for a time, and to reinterpret religious teachings are themselves subversions of patriarchal domination and control, thus should be perceived as a kind of women's empowerment. Moreover, members of *perwiridan* extend the values of *perwiridan* by multiplying its functions to include activities which are important in fulfilling their interests and needs. If empowerment includes the enhancement of women's ability to construct knowledge and to use it to fulfil their daily interests and needs, then *perwiridan* is empowering to women.

The collaboration between SPI, as a women's community-based organisation, with HAPSARI suggested the significant roles a women-focused NGO can play in strengthening women's agency, not only in the household but also in reshaping gendered relations at the community level. SPI provides an alternative space and setting

for social interaction and support for women, the benefits of which are also extended to community members as a whole. Introducing women to other forms of organisation, besides *perwiridan*, enhances the number of public spaces open to grassroots women. SPI in collaboration with HAPSARI plays a significant role in introducing women to formal meeting and lobbying structures and processes as well as enhancing their familiarity and capability in engaging with and influencing the formal politics of local governance. The solidarity, self-esteem, confidence, and networking that many experienced through participating in SPI fosters women's resilience in facing threats and violence, such as when they were threatened to be put in prison because of their activity in SPI or when they participated in a demonstration with other civil society organisations, demanding government to be accountable and responsive to people's needs. This, in turn, strengthened women's agency and enabled women to produce effective strategies in challenging the intertwining of private and public patriarchy and in influencing public decision making.

Allying with men was crucial to achieving women's empowerment in many cases. Chapters Seven and Eight provided evidence that alternative strategies allowed women to establish a common platform from which they could work with men, and based on which men willingly took sides with women in challenging and reshaping gendered local governance. Just as women frequently feel alienated in engaging in formal public processes and structures, men in general and male local government officials in particular may also have little knowledge and feel vulnerable and alienated when issues relating to domestic and informal activities and processes which women frequently use are raised. Therefore, it is important to introduce and include men more in these informal spaces and activities.

Bringing men on board to support women's empowerment through male consciousness raising, although a difficult and challenging process, is very important. This includes encouraging women to ask men in the household to share domestic chores which previously were perceived as women's primary obligation. By raising awareness among men that the empowerment of women is critical for the betterment of women overall,

and their household survival and community welfare, it will be easier to establish alliances among women and men members of the community in engaging, demanding, and influencing local governance. The inclusion of men in SPI and HAPSARI has been empowering to both men and women because they work together in challenging and reshaping patriarchal structures at the community level. Through networking with various sectoral mass organisations in Deli Serdang such as plantation workers, fishers, farmers and labourers, SPI enhances their influence, especially in monitoring and demanding accountability from the village government.

In Chapter Two it was suggested by some feminists that decentralisation would bring local government closer to women (Philips, 1996; Halford et al., 1997; Mauclay, 1998; Molyneux, 2001), yet this has not been realised in North Sumatra. Instead, there has been a revival of local patriarchal values and resistance of local government structures and institutions to women's empowerment. Women's participation in decision making has not automatically improved through decentralisation due to the widely held assumption among local government of the commonality of women's interests with those of the community in general. One of the responses of North Sumatra women to the implementation of decentralisation is the formation of the federation HAPSARI, FSPM which is aimed at enhancing both the organisational and political effectiveness of the women's movement in influencing policymaking in North Sumatra. This demonstrated revealed women's awareness of the importance of engagement in formal politics should they intend to influence public decision making. Consolidation of power among women's groups, as shown by SPI and HAPSARI, is critical in scaling up and enhancing women's effectiveness in influencing public decision making.

One of the main contributions of this study is to highlight the significant role religious groupings can play in empowering women. While there has been much debate on constraints put by religion on women, there has been little attention given to the possibility of religious groupings acting as an alternative path to empowerment for women. This issue is crucial since in many developing countries, including Indonesia, the majority of women are involved in religious groupings. Religious groupings such as

perwiridan provide women with a diversion from their daily routines and chores while also providing an enjoyable space in which they can share their feelings and experiences with other women. Through this interaction women become cognisant of their identity and build solidarity. *Perwiridan* provides an alternative space and setting for social interaction and support for women, the benefits of which are also extended to community members as a whole.

This study suggests there is an urgent need for recognition and integration of spaces and strategies which allow women's voices to be heard. Since women are usually more comfortable in discussing their problems and feelings with other women, special attention needs to be given to providing training and facilities for women's groupings such as religious groupings and self-rotating credit schemes (*arisan*) at the local level which enhance their capability in dealing with domestic violence and other forms of discrimination against women. Local governments need to extend their collaboration and financial assistance beyond the PKK (Family Welfare Empowerment) organisation and Dharma Wanita (Civil Service Bureaucracy Women's Auxiliary) to include women's community-based organisations, religious groupings and other informal women's groupings at the grassroots level in which more women participate. On the other hand, women at the grassroots and women-focused NGOs should not overlook the value of women's discussing and learning together about religious teachings as this can be as important as enhancing women's awareness of formal political activities.

These findings confirm the arguments of poststructural feminists who support the recognition of alternative/informal spaces/sites of resistance, responses and strategies (Marchand, 1995; Marchand & Parpart, 1995; Udayagiri, 1995; Rai, 1996; Waylen, 1996). Poststructural feminism has contributed much in highlighting the informal spaces, processes and structures women use to negotiate, resist, challenge, deconstruct and reconstruct local governance and their impact on local governance. However, while poststructuralism plays an important role in highlighting women's agency, it tends to ignore the influence of formal structures of government and local government and interactions between the formal and informal. Little attention has been given to

discussing the impact of local government on women and how gender relations in formal spaces influence gender relations at the household level where most grassroots women in Third World countries exercise their citizenship. Also, in Third World countries local governments have strong formal power in decision making and in managing local resources. Therefore, formal aspects of local governance should be examined. The gendered dynamics of the interactions between formal strategies and informal strategies and how they influence women's lives need to be given more attention.

In Search of Gender-Sensitive Local Governance

Sustainable and equitable development will not be realised if governance is not good since governance is the exercise of power in managing development. Good governance ensures that distribution and redistribution of power and resources is managed through participatory processes and structures (Bhatta, 1998; Wijkman, 1998; Minogue et al., 1998; Larmour, 2000). Thus, participation by both men and women is the cornerstone of good governance. Governance will not be good if it fails to accommodate women's interests and needs as one group of stakeholders in governance or if it obstructs their participation as stakeholders. In other words, without gender equity in the management of society and resources, the concept of good governance is unrealistic and should be questioned.

Although the concept of governance suggests the transformation of the interaction between stakeholders based on participation, transparency and accountability, the emphasis on formal and instrumental concepts of power and participation contributes to the neglect of women in governance in practice. The conventional discussion and analysis of democratic governance focuses almost exclusively on women's representation in legislative bodies and the bureaucracy. Thus, discussing women's empowerment is difficult in discussing governance since the concept of governance has long been equated with the public sphere where activities are perceived as suitable for men and less conducive for women. Governance encompasses a set of social relationships between diverse stakeholders. Power relations between stakeholders determine the outcome of local governance. Although legitimacy, participation, and

partnership are principles in realising development, these concepts need to be gender sensitive and measured against gender indicators.

The main argument I stress here is that there is an urgent need for the redefinition of the concepts of good governance, governance and local governance, so that they capture the roots of problems in engendering local governance as well as addressing these problems effectively in line with women's empowerment. Thus, in Third World countries the concepts of good governance, governance and local governance should include more emphasis on the multiplicity of formal and informal spaces and strategies for influencing local governance and how to enhance the quality of interactions among stakeholders, especially being sensitive to differences among them.

This study questions the universal applicability of the implementation of international development discourse on empowering women through a GAD approach since this study recognises constructions of power at each level of government. A GAD approach can not be applied in a vacuum, rather, it is implemented in the midst of power struggles over resources between different levels of government. Thus, it is important to raise awareness among femocrats and bureaucrats at the local level about understanding and incorporating feminist visions and goals.

The implementation of GAD in Indonesia is complicated by power struggles at the local level which take form in resistance, accommodation, negotiation and conflict. Gender mainstreaming as proposed by a GAD approach is yet to be understood well among local government officials in North Sumatra, let alone to be popular and familiar to grassroots women. Thus, it tends to be neglected in the multiplicity of structures and spaces where decision making can be produced. The implementation of GAD or gender mainstreaming in Indonesia, as revealed in Chapters Five and Eight, is more at the national than the local government level and has little impact on grassroots women. The imposition of GAD by international development agencies on national governments occurs without recognising and incorporating the distinctiveness of each locality with its own power constructions. This also creates tensions and conflict between central and

local government due to the lack of common perceptions as to how to empower women (Chapter Eight).

Notwithstanding the significance and influence of good governance at national level, this study argues that the realisation of good governance at the local level is most crucial to women's lives considering the proximity of local governance to women. It is at the local level that women live their daily lives and struggle to use the available spaces and resources to pursue their interests and needs. Realising gender-sensitive local governance is crucial. Chapters Six through to Eight provides evidence of women's significant contributions to local development. This study brings women's agency and the way women shape and respond to processes and structures of local governance to the fore, rather than seeing them as passive receivers of service delivery from local government. The study rejects the assumption of the passivity of women as recipients in local governance. Chapters Five to Eight revealed that in the absence of services which women need, women actively take over local government functions in providing services. The danger is that this kind of participation, in the absence of women's role in decision making at the local level, may be used by local government to reduce the cost of service delivery rather than to reach out to women and serve their interests more effectively.

In the North Sumatra case, the interlocking of private and public spheres means that strategies in engendering local governance, to be effective, require more than the legal and institutional policies which have been suggested by liberal feminists. Rather, there needs to be direct strategies working towards the strengthening of networks among women and femocrats, in making formal public activities and institutions more sensitive and responsive to women.

Deconstruction and widening of the concept of local governance is necessary in order to recognise alternative informal spaces and strategies of women, thus recognising women's interests and needs. Conventional discussions on local governance focus on delivering services efficiently by expanding community participation and synergy

between local government and community members through interaction in public forums/spheres. The conventional concept of local governance also strengthens the widely spread assumption among local government institutions of the commonality of women's interests to those of the community. It rarely includes discussion on the significance of interpersonal relations at the household level and between community members, including women and civil society. Rarely does it touch on informal spaces where women are mostly involved, such as *perwiridan*, *arisan* and CBOs which in reality have contributed much to local development and frequently take over the provision of services for the community and family which should be the obligations of local government.

Thus, reconceptualising/redefining local governance concepts, structures and processes is crucial in engendering local governance since gender relations and gendered interests are embedded in them. Only by reconceptualising/redefining these concepts may we understand the roots to political, organisational and sociocultural resistance to the engendering of local governance and women's empowerment. A gender perspective will reveal differences among stakeholders in using structures and institutions, and what resources, options and strategies are available to them in both formal and informal spheres. This could enable us to identify what mechanisms and what kinds of spaces of local governance are available for women to act individually and/or collectively in exercising their rights as citizens.

A reconceptualisation of local governance based upon gender analysis will reveal the roots of women's subordination as well as opportunities to challenge and transform gendered power structures and processes. The deconstruction of the gendered division of private and public spheres, as suggested by feminists, is crucial by bringing in critical components of active citizenship - that is the daily life struggles at the household level and the diversity of other informal spaces and strategies women use to exert their rights and obligations. By assuming local governance as comprising multilayered structures in which power over local resources is continuously negotiated through diverse strategies between stakeholders in both public and private spheres in fulfilling their interests and

needs, the mutual interrelationships between private and public spheres may be revealed. Informal spaces women use together such as *perwiridan*, *arisan*, neighbourhood activities and grassroots organisations are integrated in these multilayered structures of local governance.

Local governance is about distribution and redistribution of power and resources at the local level, in which through accountable local government, diverse stakeholders at the local level fulfil their interests and needs. Engendering local governance, therefore, means gender equity, empowerment and transformation of the gendered interactions between state and nonstate actors in local governance processes. Engendering local governance is not merely a technical issue, but also a political one since it consists of struggles among groups with their diverse resources and accessibility to resources and institutions. Gender-sensitive local governance will ensure that mobilisation of resources at the local level will be followed by just redistribution of resources and development to diverse stakeholders without ignoring women who actively contribute to provide local resources. By placing more emphasis on the gender sensitivity of programmes and service delivery, such as women's reproductive health centres, credit schemes for women, sanitation, and other welfare-related programmes aimed to equalise gender relation, local governments could play a strategic role in deconstructing these inequalities.

The inclusion of women, not only in delivering services but more importantly in influencing and determining local development agendas and the management of power at the local level, is crucial for the realisation of a just redistribution of development resources which contributes to sustainable development. Gender-sensitive local governance through synergistic partnerships among stakeholders will improve the quality of service delivery and the enjoyment of service delivery, since diverse stakeholders contribute to, influence and share control over development initiatives and decision making. The improved quality of services will enhance the quality of the everyday life of stakeholders. Thus, attention needs to be given not only to differences of women's interests and needs but also to differences of mechanisms, spaces and

strategies women use in fulfilling their interests. Local government should increase dialogue with the public through public hearings and other public forums, and use these forums to raise public awareness on gender issues and to promote gender equality programmes. Any participatory development mechanisms, however, need to be sensitive to gender segregation, cultural practices and norms within North Sumatra communities. Considering the widespread shame and fear (*malu and takut*) among women to speak up in public, local government need to conduct sex segregated discussion groups with women at the grassroots. Special attention needs to be given to conducting gender segregated public hearings and at the same time providing mechanisms that ensure women's groups and other groups which have long been marginalised in local governance are to be heard and considered in decision making.

Concluding Remarks

The main contribution of this thesis is to assert the importance of the household and alternative spheres in debates surrounding means for engendering local governance. Household relations and alternative/informal forms of community participation have yet to receive adequate attention in development literature regarding local governance. For example, this research found that religious groupings provide an alternative space for women's empowerment.

Local governance is not solely about public activities which occur only in local formal institutions and structures/organisations, but it is also about managing power and power relations among stakeholders so that there will be equality in distribution and redistribution of local resources. Beside service delivery and extending participation, empowerment of women is an important role of local government since this will enhance the quality of both the management of society and the quality of civic engagement.

Women in North Sumatra, as this study has shown, have many capabilities and have contributed much to local governance by taking over service delivery which is supposed

to be a local government function. They have also produced effective strategies to challenge and reshape local governance. It is time now to make diverse stakeholders in local governance recognise and integrate women's contributions as well as their interests and needs in local governance since gender-sensitive local governance is critical for the welfare of the whole community. Engendering local governance requires the transformation of processes and structures of local governance through consciousness raising and the improvement of the state and local government approaches so that they can empower women rather than relying exclusively on technical and formal institutional mechanisms.

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APPENDIX ONE

Reference	Participant/s	Technique used
CBO1	SPI Bingkat	FGD
CBO2	SPI Gabungan (Balai Benih)	FGD
CBO3	SPI Gabungan (Lubuk Pakam)	FGD
CBO4	Key person in SPI	Interview
CBO5	Key person in SPI	Interview
CBO6	SPI Langkat	Interview
CBO7	Key person in SPI	Interview
LGO1	Male government official in North Sumatra	Interview
LGO2	Male government official in North Sumatra	Interview
LGO3	Male government official in North Sumatra	Interview
LGO4	Female government official in North Sumatra	Interview
LGO5	Female government official in North Sumatra	Interview
LGO6	Female government official in North Sumatra	Interview

LGO7	Male government official in North Sumatra	Interview
LGO8	Male government official in North Sumatra	Interview
LGO9	Female government official in North Sumatra	Interview
LGO10	Female government official in North Sumatra	Interview
LGO11	Male government officials in North Sumatra	Interview
LGO12	Officials of <i>Kelurahan</i> Melayu	FGD
LGO13	Head of <i>kelurahan</i> Melayu	Interview
LGO14	Head of neighbourhood <i>kelurahan</i> Melayu (Male)	Interview
LGO15	Head of neighbourhood <i>kelurahan</i> Melayu (Female)	Interview
MMC	Male member of community	Interview
MP1	Male member of DPRD	Interview
MP2	Female member of DPRD	Interview
NGO1	Leader of HAPSARI	Interview
NGO2	NGOs in Deli Serdang	FGD

NGO3	A male member of NGO in Medan	Interview
NGO4	Federasi HAPSARI	Interview
NGO5	A women focused NGO in Sidikalang	Interview
NGO6	Male members and leaders of NGOs in Deli Serdang	FGD
NGO7	A leader of NGO in Medan	Interview
NGO8	A female member of NGO in Medan	Interview
NGO9	A female member of NGO	Interview
NGO10	JOIPARA	Interview
NGO11	Leader of a Christian women organisation in North Sumatra	Interview
RG1	<i>Perwiridan kelurahan</i> Melayu	FGD
RG2	<i>Perwiridan</i> P.Bulan	FGD
RG3	Christian women's organisation in Samosir	FGD
RG4	Leader of <i>perwiridan kelurahan</i> Melayu	Interview
PKK	PKK (Family Welfare Empowerment)	Interview
VRBD	Female members of VRB (Village Representative Body in Deli Serdang)	FGD

WSC1	Women's Studies Centre 1	Interview
WSC2	Women's Studies Centre 2	Interview
SW	Seminar and Workshop (<i>Semiloka</i>)	Seminar and Workshop

