YOUNG PEOPLE CHALLENGING CHILD MARRIAGE IN INDONESIA
INDONESIA

CHANGE STORY
Inti Muda, a youth-led network that focuses on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for young people most affected by HIV, has used its close links with marginalised young people to ensure news of the law change is reaching the communities where it matters the most. This includes the rural province of Papua where child marriage is common. Unlike the rest of Indonesia, Papua has a generalised HIV epidemic and in 2016 was experiencing new infections at 15 times the national rate, with women of reproductive age particularly affected.

"A lot of girls are getting married under the age of 16, especially in Papua, some are as young as 13," says Sepi Maulana Ardiansyah (known as Davi), Inti Muda’s national coordinator. "They are not ready to have sex, be pregnant or have a baby. From the cultural viewpoint their vulnerability to rights violations is very high. It is really easy for young girls to become a victim of violence when they start to build a family so young."

"It is this and what the adolescent girls themselves speak out about that will make change. Based on the change in regulation (law) now they can say ‘we are not allowed to marry’. It gives them a reason to say no."

Davi

Changing practices

With PITCH’s support, Inti Muda began building relationships in Papuan communities in 2018, strategically targeting adolescents and young people, plus stakeholders including traditional and religious leaders, teachers, government officials and the media.

Slowly they introduced training workshops that focus on young people’s SRHR, discussing topics such as gender equality, gender-based violence and safer sex. With other PITCH partners, Inti Muda created an accompanying training module on young people’s SRHR, plus an additional module aimed at developing young SRHR advocates. Both firmly put the perspectives of young people most affected by HIV at the centre. By early 2020, 100 key people in Papua had been trained.

“During the stakeholder trainings adolescent girls give their perspective so others understand the need to stop them being married off. I am optimistic this will start to change practice because these leaders have real influence over other leaders and families and this will determine what happens. They hold the key.
Rising voices

Davi says one of the most encouraging signs in Papua is seeing young people start to mobilise. In 2020, after participating in Inti Muda’s training, a group of young people formed the SRHR Movement in Papua and have since been advocating for their own rights.

“We have invested a lot in them and I am seeing future young leaders emerge, including young women,” says Davi. “We have seen them really grow in the activism field.”

In February 2020, Inti Muda supported the SRHR Movement in Papua to bring together influential community leaders to sign a public declaration before the eyes of the media pledging to protect the SRHR of adolescent girls and young women in Papua, including young key populations. The group is now using this pledge to hold local leaders to account on respecting the new marriage regulation.

Beyond Papua

But it is not just in Papua that Inti Muda is helping to spread the word about young people’s SRHR. The organisation has become particularly skilled at using social media to raise awareness.

Inti Muda Indonesia’s YouTube channel #IMFormations posts weekly interviews with SRHR experts and also hosts online SRHR learning sessions led by young people. The organisation is also very active on Facebook, Instagram, Tiktok and Twitter.

“We are also working with influencers, including YouTubers, Miss Universe Indonesia and a singer from Indonesian Idol, to reach more young people. They have a lot of followers, and if they speak about something their followers will listen. This has really helped us.”

“We have started trying out certain tactics, such as doing prize giveaways to increase engagement,”

Davi
Fears for the future

Inti Muda has just agreed its 2021-2024 strategy, which focuses on six areas. These include undertaking legal protection for vulnerable young people by documenting and responding to rights violations, building equal partnerships to increase resources, advocating to influence policies, and further increasing young key populations’ knowledge and awareness of their SRHR.

Davi, who steps down as the network’s leader in 2021, says he hopes to see a young woman take over. But he has serious concerns about the difficulties Inti Muda may face when the PITCH programme ends at the end of 2020.

“Young people can be shy with older adults, they fear being judged and can be afraid to say what they think. That’s why we need young people to work for young people, while working in partnership with adult-led organisations so we can learn from them.”

“A new generation is always coming – new young people, new young girls, will be born and raised – so we need to work hard to ensure the changes we have created keep going.”

In May 2019, advocacy from a coalition of community organisations, including PITCH partners, resulted in the Indonesian Government increasing the legal marriage age for women from 16 to 19, bringing it in line with men. Here, youth-led network aidsfonds.org      frontlineaids.org

“For adult-led organisations there is more help, but for young people the trust from the donors is often very low so it is harder to get support. PITCH has been unusual in placing such trust in youth-led organisations and without it we may struggle. I hope Inti Muda is still there – we will do our best to continue – but we need financial and technical support.”

Davi

Inti Muda explains how it has worked with marginalised young people in the rural province of Papua to ensure the amended law is helping to change practices in communities where it matters the most.

All photos are by Inti Muda

The Partnership to Inspire, Transform and Connect the HIV response (PITCH) strengthens community-based organisations’ capacity to uphold the rights of populations most affected by HIV by engaging in effective advocacy, generating robust evidence and developing meaningful policy solutions.

PITCH is a strategic partnership between Aidsfonds, Frontline AIDS and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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