

## One thousand women on a digital march: strengthening female-led social and creative enterprises across Indonesia

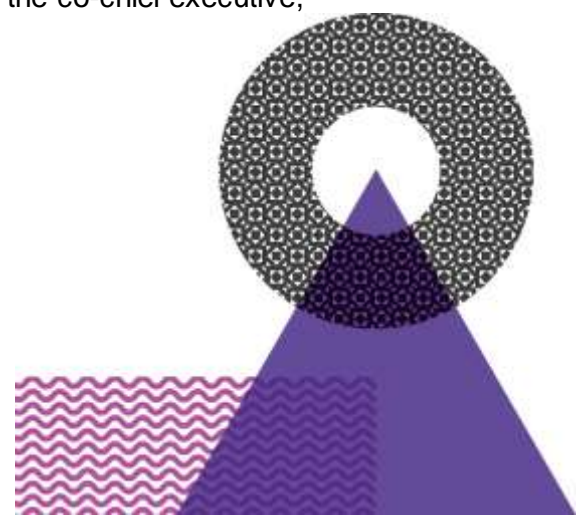
by Andrew Thompson

Women make up half Indonesia's population of around 260m people, but account for less than half the country's workforce. "Economic and social development requires more female employment and female entrepreneurship. A programme called Perempuan Maju Dengan Digital, which can be translated as 'Women Advance in Digital', aims to support women to set up and run their own businesses. In fact, judging by the number of women who have attended workshops in six key cities, taken part in webinars, and engaged with social media, more than one thousand of them have begun an online journey that will help establish new, or strengthen existing, female-led social and creative enterprises. As part of the process ten diverse enterprises, ranging from eco-tourism through to agriculture and education, have been given a strong boost.



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Two creative and rather different companies are behind the programme. One of them is [Think.Web](#), a digital impact agency based in Jakarta. Anantya, the co-chief executive, explains that the company came into existence ten years ago as a purely commercial consultancy that nevertheless developed its own approach to pro bono work. At first Think.Web simply allowed all its staff to spend up to 10 per cent of company time working for charitable causes. Then, about five years ago, it identified four key areas of non-profit activity: work with women, children, those with disabilities, and those creating social enterprises. Staff were encouraged



to develop projects in those four areas, with the proviso that they would also need to find partners and funders to cover the costs over at least one year.

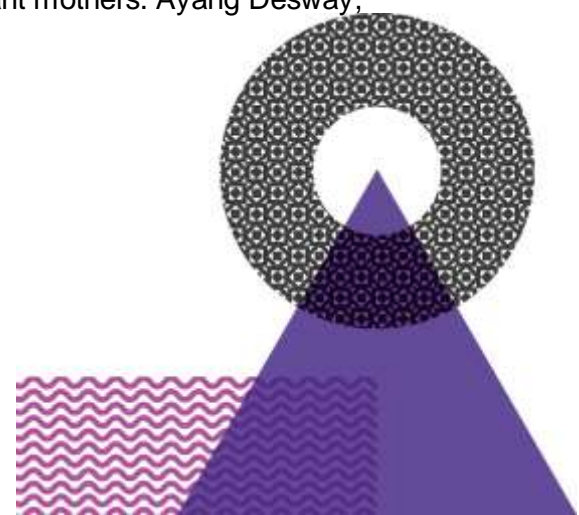
The other organisation is [Birmingham Open Media](#) – BOM, a UK-based centre for art, technology, and science. Karen Newman, director and founder, laughs and says that BOM likes to work “small and deep”, while Think.Web goes “wide and far”. “Think.Web are really great at developing brands and stories around projects and organisations” she says, “while at BOM we are more experimental, pulling apart technology, following our nose to see what happens, and then coming up with a brand at the end”. The two organisations were introduced by the British Council, which is also backing the project with a Collaboration Grant from the DICE Fund. It is clear that they hope their combined skills will allow them to go “deep and far”.

The project they have shaped has been running in six Indonesian cities, chosen for their high levels of internet connectivity and vibrant women-led businesses. The six are Bogor, Padang, Malang, Semarang, Ambon, and Pontianak. A total of 500 women in the six cities were engaged with the project and given initial workshop training and support. From this group 100 were selected to take part in a MOOC – the acronym for a massive, online open course. The course was designed and delivered by Think.Web with BOM commissioning seven documentary videos that charted the experience of UK-based creative social enterprises, drew comparisons with Indonesia, and covered a range of business issues like company mission and vision, effective online marketing, branding, and how to pitch ideas to investors. The MOOC participants then had to make their own minute-long video business pitches, which were assessed by the course organisers and used to select the ten best social and creative enterprise ideas.

Anantya and Karen are energised by the range of ideas that made it to the “top ten” and qualified for additional support and mentoring. Anantya points out that surveys of all participants conducted before and after the workshops demonstrated significant improvements in confidence and gains in two important areas: critical thinking and digital literacy. As an example, in Semarang the proportion saying they were confident that they could solve problems in their businesses rose from 71 per cent before they attended the workshops, to 86 per cent afterwards. Most participants were under 25 or over 40 years old. Fifty-five per cent of those participating were already running their own businesses, with the remainder planning to start up.

The final ten selected enterprises cover a wide range. Fitri Hantrini from West Kalimantan has proposed a sustainable eco-tourism company to organise visits to the forests of Borneo. She has been inspired by similar enterprises in Vietnam and wants local villagers to offer homestays and forest experiences that preserve the area’s biodiversity. Esterlina Se from Pontianak is working with other local women to recycle fabrics into purses, bags, and other items. Winarni Saftarya Gultom, who lives in Jakarta but joined the programme in Bogor, wants to set up an open source educational platform to teach local farmers how to manage their crops without causing deforestation. Asyifa from Bogor, a mid-wife, is developing online events and classes to promote well-being for new and expectant mothers. Ayang Desway, also from Bogor, is working on an English language teaching app that can be used in after-school clubs to develop creative writing. In part her idea is to offer a break from the heavily rule-based approach to language teaching in schools, which focuses on grammar and spelling.

Arum Sukma Kinasih from Semarang currently runs Beautiful Soul, a mental health support programme for survivors of domestic violence. Her plan is to turn it into a mixed-stream



business, with revenue-generating activities such as yoga, meditation, and creative writing classes. Another entrepreneur is Ratih Perdhani from Semarang who is selling a range of premium healthy teas sourced from plantations that meet “fair trade” standards in terms of work force terms and conditions. Laura Octavia from Ambon has set up a company with her husband to give unemployed youth a chance to make and sell products made from recycled rubber. Marla Firmantry from Padang is developing a cooperative bakery. Eka Ning from Malang is reviving the traditional art of orchid farming. While the Perempuan Maju Dengan Digital project formally came to an end in March 2020, its graduates are eager to march on, with their enterprises growing and building their positive impact.

