

# Models And Policies For Gender Equality In The Mampu Program, Australia And Indonesia During The COVID-19 Era

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## Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated gender inequality, with a more significant impact felt by women, especially in the economic, social, and health sectors. Rising cases of domestic violence, economic disparities, and unequal access to health services are the main challenges women face during the pandemic. The MAMPU (Australia-Indonesia Partnership for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment) program has been instrumental in addressing gender inequality through raising women's awareness and advocating for legal changes that support gender equality. This study aims to analyze the impact of the MAMPU Program in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in Indonesia and Australia, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. The method used in this study is a qualitative approach with a descriptive-exploratory design. Primary data were obtained through semi-structured interviews and participatory observations with stakeholders involved in the program, including MAMPU Program partners and gender studies experts. Data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach that identified significant patterns, relationships, and insights regarding the program's policies and implementation. The results of the study show that the MAMPU Program has succeeded in fighting for women's rights, reducing gender-based violence, and increasing women's access to economic opportunities. However, challenges in policy implementation and implementation at the community level still need to be overcome. The conclusions of this study show that bilateral programs such as MAMPU have great potential in creating sustainable social change, but their long-term success is highly dependent on increased community engagement, policy strengthening, and more comprehensive evaluation.

**Keywords:** Gender inequality, women's empowerment, Covid-19, economic disparity, MAMPU Program.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly reshaped social and economic structures worldwide, disproportionately impacting women and exacerbating pre-existing gender inequalities. Across various dimensions—economic stability, healthcare access, and social well-being—women have borne the brunt of the crisis, facing heightened vulnerabilities and structural disadvantages. The pandemic has not only widened the gender gap but has also intensified issues such as domestic violence, financial insecurity, and limited access to healthcare services, necessitating a critical examination of gender-responsive policies and interventions.

One of the most alarming gendered consequences of the pandemic has been the escalation of violence against women. As financial strain, job losses, and movement restrictions heightened household tensions, cases of domestic abuse, including physical, psychological, and sexual violence, rose sharply. Between March and July 2020 alone, 14,719 cases of violence against women were reported, comprising 5,448 incidents of physical abuse, 2,123 cases of psychological violence, and 4,898 instances of sexual violence. Additionally, cases of economic violence, labour exploitation, and human trafficking further underscore the multifaceted risks faced by women during the crisis. The majority of these cases (75.4%) occurred in private domestic settings, while 24.4% took place within communities, and a smaller fraction (0.08%) was linked to state institutions. (Pebri et al., 2024).

The economic ramifications of the pandemic have further deepened gender disparities. Women are disproportionately employed in sectors most vulnerable to economic downturns, such as hospitality, retail, and informal labour, leading to a higher rate of job losses compared to men. Those who remained employed faced additional challenges, particularly under work-from-home (WFH) policies, which increased their burden of unpaid domestic labour (Anshor & Muttaqin, 2022). According to research by Emily Staudhard, women reported spending twice as much time as men on household tasks, with over 96% acknowledging an increased workload due to school closures and caregiving responsibilities. Comparative study across Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Australia by McLaren

revealed that Malaysia exhibited the most extreme gendered disparities, with women experiencing a threefold burden of work, caregiving, and household responsibilities (McLaren et al., 2020).

The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report (2021) highlights the long-term implications of these setbacks, estimating that the pandemic has widened the gender gap to such an extent that it will take 135 years to achieve global gender equality, an increase from the pre-pandemic estimate of 99 years. (Novianty, 2022). This regression underscores the urgency of implementing policy-driven solutions and institutional interventions to mitigate the socio-economic disparities exacerbated by the pandemic.

The previous research has been done by Anshor, A. M., & Muttaqin, M. N. (2022). The Implementation of Gender-Responsive Fiqh: A Study of Model Application of Women-Friendly and Child Care Village in Post-COVID-19 Pandemic. *Justicia Islamica*, 19(1), 132–152. This study investigates the role of gender-responsive Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) in creating women-friendly and child-care villages in Indonesia, particularly in the post-pandemic era. It explores how religious frameworks can help shape more inclusive gender policies, closely aligning with the gender empowerment goals of the MAMPU Program.

Furthermore, McLaren, H. J., Wong, K. R., Nguyen, K. N., & Mahamadachchi, K. N. D. (2020). COVID-19 and Women's Triple Burden: Vignettes from Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Australia. *Social Sciences*, 9(5), 87. This study examines the triple burden of work, caregiving, and household responsibilities experienced by women during the COVID-19 pandemic across various countries, including Australia. It highlights the exacerbation of gender inequality due to the pandemic and provides insights relevant to analyzing the impact of programs like MAMPU in addressing such issues.

The novelty of this research lies in its approach that examines the impact of the MAMPU program in the context of gender equality and women's empowerment during the COVID-19 pandemic, by comparing the implementation of the program in Indonesia and Australia. This research provides new insights into the challenges faced by women in dealing with worsening gender inequality due to the pandemic, as well as the role of bilateral policies in addressing this issue. In addition, this study also integrates Women in Development (WID) theory to design a crisis-responsive model of women's empowerment, which has not been explored in previous studies.

The relationship between women's empowerment and economic development has been widely examined in various contexts, demonstrating its critical role in fostering economic growth, poverty reduction, and sustainable development. Several studies highlight the economic benefits of gender equality, particularly in the agriculture and labour sectors, emphasizing that inclusive policies contribute to overall societal well-being.

(De Janvry & Sadoulet, 2002) Examine the impact of women's empowerment in the agricultural sector in rural India and find that increasing women's participation in agriculture enhances agricultural output and family welfare. Their findings underscore the importance of women's empowerment in achieving sustainable agricultural development, as gender-inclusive agricultural policies contribute to food security and rural prosperity.

Gender inequality has been identified as a barrier to economic development. (Klasen, 1999), In his cross-country analysis, he finds that gender inequality negatively affects economic growth, as limited access to education and employment opportunities for women hampers overall economic productivity. His research advocates for policy interventions to reduce gender disparities, emphasizing that investing in women's education and economic participation yields long-term economic benefits.

This study aims to analyze the impact of the MAMPU Program in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in Indonesia and Australia, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The main focus of the research is to evaluate the effectiveness of these programs in championing women's rights, addressing gender-based violence, and promoting economic opportunities for women, ultimately contributing to the creation of a more just and equal society.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the impact of the MAMPU (Australia-Indonesia Partnership for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment) program in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in Indonesia and Australia, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the policies and strategies implemented in the program, as well as identify the challenges and successes faced in their implementation. In addition, this research also aims to develop a model of women's empowerment based on the theory of Women in Development (WID), which can provide adaptive solutions to gender inequality exacerbated by global crises such as pandemics.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research approach with a descriptive-exploratory design to gain an in-depth understanding of gender equality development within the Mampu Program. Qualitative research is particularly suited for exploring complex social phenomena, as it emphasizes process over outcomes and relies on inductive analysis to develop insights from data rather than testing pre-determined hypotheses. This approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of gender-related initiatives, focusing on how they are implemented and their impact on the targeted communities.

The research utilizes primary data collected through semi-structured interviews and participant observations. The interview method provides a flexible yet systematic approach to gathering insights from individuals directly involved in gender equality initiatives. By using semi-structured interviews, the study ensures that key themes are addressed while allowing participants to share their perspectives freely. Participants were selected based on their expertise and involvement in gender-related programs, ensuring a diverse range of insights that reflect both academic and practical experiences.

The study examines 13 partners of the Mampu Program who have received funding for gender equality development initiatives. Additionally, experts in gender studies from the University of Western Australia (UWA) were interviewed, including Dr. Flavia, Dr. Kelly, and Dr. Jessica, all of whom are lecturers and academics specializing in gender studies at UWA. To further enrich the study, interviews were also conducted with doctoral students specializing in gender studies and members of the Muslim community in Perth. The inclusion of academic experts, researchers, and community representatives provides a comprehensive understanding of gender equality efforts, incorporating both theoretical perspectives and practical experiences.

To ensure ethical integrity, the study adheres to strict ethical principles. All participants were informed about the research objectives and provided informed consent before participating in interviews. Additionally, confidentiality. The study employs an inductive thematic analysis approach, following the framework developed by Miles & Huberman (1994). Data is systematically coded, categorized, and analysed to identify emerging themes related to gender equality initiatives. This method enables the recognition of patterns, relationships, and significant insights from participants' perspectives.

The analysis follows three key stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. First, data reduction involves selecting, focusing, simplifying, and transforming raw interview data to highlight relevant aspects of gender equality programs. Next, data display is conducted using matrices and charts to organize information systematically, facilitating the identification of recurring themes. Finally, conclusion drawing and verification ensure that findings are well-supported by evidence, strengthening the study's reliability.

This study examines 13 Mampu Program partners and experts in gender studies at the University of Western Australia (UWA). In-depth interviews were conducted with key experts, including Dr. Flavia, Dr. Kelly, and Dr. Jessica, who are lecturers and academics at UWA. Additionally, doctoral students and members of the Muslim community in Perth participated in discussions to provide diverse perspectives on gender empowerment initiatives. Through this analytical approach, the study aims to develop a comprehensive understanding of the Mampu Program's effectiveness in promoting gender equality.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Australian Women's Perspective on Gender and Equality

Gender issues in Australia have long been a central focus of government policy and social discourse. The Australian government has implemented various strategies to promote gender equality, one of the most significant being the Gender Empowerment Strategic Department's 2016 initiative. This initiative formulated stronger gender policies by the UN Resolution Guidelines for Women, Peace, and Security (2012–2018), emphasizing a national action plan that includes a dedicated section on domestic affairs and household gender commitments. Dr. Flavia, an academic expert in gender studies, highlighted that the Australian government has made significant progress in promoting gender equality through policy innovations. One of the latest advancements is the National Women's Strategy 2020–2030, which focuses on women's health and well-being. She emphasized:

“The Australian government has issued a new policy specifically regarding women's health called the National Women's Strategy 2020–2030, which, according to the government, is a better policy than before.”

This policy reflects a more comprehensive and progressive approach, ensuring that gender equality efforts are not only concentrated in workplace participation but also extend to health, safety, and socio-economic well-being. Similarly, Dr. Kelly supported this view by pointing out that gender development in Australia continues to progress in line with the aspirations of Australian women themselves. She observed:

“Gender development in Australia is improving when viewed from the side of women's initiatives. Although this development effort is not part of the MAMPU program, the environment, social, and cultural environment in Australia is quite developed in supporting gender issues. One concrete example can be seen from the political aspect, where Julia Gillard, after being elected as the first female PM in Australia, brought a very positive atmosphere, especially in gender-related areas. However, since Julia Gillard finished her term, there are not many women who want to dive into the world of politics after seeing how the press, media, and opposition treated Julia.”

This finding suggests that while institutional frameworks and policies are advancing gender equality, the socio-political environment still presents challenges, particularly for women's political representation and participation. The case of Julia Gillard, Australia's first female Prime Minister, demonstrates how negative media treatment and political opposition can discourage women from pursuing leadership roles.

The COVID-19 pandemic introduced new challenges to gender equality, particularly in terms of violence against women and work-life balance. According to Dr. Flavia, the government's Work from Home (WFH) policy had unintended consequences, disproportionately affecting women in the workplace. She explained:

“In 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, government policies requiring Work from Home (WFH) led to an assessment of its impact on women in the workplace. This assessment was also assisted by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade through a partnership program called the Developmental Response to COVID-19 in Australia. Among the findings obtained after the assessment was an increase in violence against women during WFH, which turned out to be different from the situation when women worked in an office setting.”

Government efforts to promote gender equality in Australia reflect a progressive and comprehensive approach, as evidenced by the National Women's Strategy 2020–2030, which prioritizes women's health, workplace participation, and social well-being. Dr. Flavia's statement affirms that this strategy represents an improvement over previous policies, suggesting a more holistic perspective on gender equality.

While these policies demonstrate strong political will, their effectiveness depends on implementation and enforcement mechanisms. Previous research on gender policy implementation in Australia suggests that policy outcomes often depend on institutional commitment, resource allocation, and community engagement (Sawer et al., 2023). Without robust monitoring and accountability structures, gender equality policies risk remaining rhetorical rather than transformative. Therefore, further research and evaluation are needed to assess how these policies translate into tangible improvements in women's daily lives, particularly in marginalized communities where gender disparities are often more pronounced.

Despite policy advancements, women's representation in leadership remains a significant challenge, particularly in political arenas. Dr. Kelly's observations highlight how negative media portrayals and hostile political environments can discourage women from pursuing leadership positions. The case of Julia Gillard, Australia's first female Prime Minister, underscores the barriers women face in politics, as her tenure was marked by gendered criticisms, media attacks, and political opposition.

This aligns with broader research on gender and political representation, which suggests that female politicians are often subjected to heightened scrutiny, personal attacks, and gendered stereotypes. (Barnes & O'Brien, 2025). The lack of sustained female leadership following Gillard's tenure suggests that symbolic representation alone is insufficient to drive long-term gender equality in politics.

To address this, structural interventions such as gender quotas in political parties, leadership development programs for women, and stronger regulations on media bias in political reporting are necessary to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for women in politics. Without these reforms, gender disparities in political leadership may persist, limiting women's influence in policymaking and governance.

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed deep-seated gender inequalities, particularly regarding domestic responsibilities and workplace flexibility. Dr. Flavia's insights highlight how Work from Home (WFH) policies disproportionately affected women, as they were expected to balance professional work with caregiving and household duties. This finding is consistent with global studies, which indicate that WFH policies often reinforced traditional gender roles, placing greater pressure on women to manage unpaid domestic labour. (Craig & Churchill, 2021).

Additionally, the increase in domestic violence during WFH further exposed systemic vulnerabilities in gender equality efforts. The confinement of family members in a shared space, combined with economic stress and lack of external support systems, created conditions that heightened the risk of domestic violence. This aligns with reports from organizations such as UN Women (2021), which documented a global rise in domestic violence cases during lockdowns.

To mitigate these challenges, gender-responsive policies must include flexible work arrangements that recognize caregiving responsibilities, stronger legal protections and support systems for victims of domestic violence, and public awareness campaigns to challenge traditional gender norms in household responsibilities. (Cameron, 2023). By addressing these structural inequalities, Australia can ensure that post-pandemic recovery efforts prioritize gender equity, preventing the reinforcement of pre-existing disparities. The findings highlight that while Australia has made significant progress in gender equality through policy initiatives, structural and cultural barriers remain. Political representation, media bias, and the gendered effects of COVID-19 continue to hinder full gender equality. The National Women's Strategy 2020–2030 provides a strong framework, but its effectiveness depends on implementation, monitoring, and societal engagement. (Sharma & Singh, 2019); (Shet et al., 2019); (Nanci & Velmurugan, 2021). To achieve meaningful and sustainable gender equality, Australia must focus on strengthening policy enforcement mechanisms, creating a more inclusive political environment for women, and implementing workplace and domestic reforms to address gender disparities exacerbated by COVID-19. By addressing these challenges, Australia can move beyond policy commitments toward tangible societal change, ensuring that gender equality is not just a governmental goal but a lived reality for all women. (Bayumi & Jaya, 2018); (Bayumi et al., 2024).

### **Models and Policies for Gender Equality in Australia**

The Australian government has continuously refined its gender-related policies to enhance the effectiveness of equality initiatives. In 2021, a new policy framework was introduced under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) for the 2021–2031 period. This framework incorporates regular impact assessments as a key component of the National Action Plan to combat violence against women and children. Although policies addressing women's health services have been in place since 2010, their initial implementation lacked substantive effectiveness due to biases in the policymaking process.

Australia's healthcare system provides universal coverage through Medicare, ensuring that every citizen has access to medical services. Australians generally prefer seeking consultations directly from specialist doctors rather than general practitioners (GPs), as specialists offer more targeted and efficient medical care. When visiting a GP, patients are often referred to specialists for further treatment. Unlike in many other countries, Australia does not have private hospitals, as all hospitals are government-owned and provide equal service quality to all patients, irrespective of socioeconomic status.

The MyGov national population database plays a crucial role in maintaining accurate demographic records and preventing data fraud. Each citizen must obtain a single ID and a unique password to access governmental services. This centralized database, managed at the federal level, facilitates seamless data access for state and local governments. However, this system contrasts with countries like Indonesia, where provincial and regional governments often face challenges in accessing population data from central authorities. For example, difficulties in obtaining accurate demographic data hindered the effective distribution of financial assistance to female micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The findings highlight both strengths and limitations in Australia's gender policy framework. The integration of gender-responsive strategies, such as the 2021–2031 National Action Plan, demonstrates the government's commitment to addressing gender-based violence. The emphasis on regular impact assessments is a positive step; however, the exclusion of civil society actors from policy evaluations weakens the potential for holistic improvements. Best practices

from other nations suggest that participatory evaluations involving CSOs, NGOs, and affected communities lead to more effective and sustainable policy reforms.

In terms of healthcare equity, Australia provides universal access to medical services, eliminating disparities based on economic status. The absence of private hospitals ensures equal treatment across all demographic groups. However, the preference for specialist consultations over general practitioners raises concerns about the accessibility and efficiency of primary healthcare. Future policy considerations should explore mechanisms to strengthen the role of general practitioners, ensuring that initial medical consultations are both efficient and cost-effective.

The MyGov national database offers a highly efficient and fraud-resistant model for population management. Compared to decentralized systems in other countries, such as Indonesia, the federal control of demographic data in Australia enables more accurate policy implementation. However, the centralized structure may pose risks related to data security and privacy. Future policies should balance the benefits of digital governance with enhanced safeguards against potential misuse of personal data.

Despite the structured approach to gender policy evaluation, the exclusion of grassroots communities from assessment processes limits the scope of impact measurement. A shift towards collaborative policymaking, integrating perspectives from women's organizations, advocacy groups, and academic institutions, would strengthen the effectiveness and inclusivity of future gender policies. Moreover, ensuring that Australia's gender policies influence broader Asia-Pacific regional frameworks could enhance gender mainstreaming efforts beyond national borders.

In conclusion, while Australia's gender policy landscape exhibits strong institutional frameworks, the challenges related to inclusive evaluations, healthcare accessibility, and data governance must be addressed to ensure sustainable progress in gender equality. Future research could explore comparative models of gender policy implementation in other developed nations to identify best practices for enhancing policy responsiveness and societal impact.

### **The Relationship Between Indonesia and Australia Regarding Gender**

Australia and Indonesia maintain a strong bilateral relationship in various fields, including trade, investment, and gender equality initiatives. Australia's commitment to promoting gender equality is driven by multiple factors, including the recognition that gender equality is fundamental to sustainable development, the protection of human rights, and regional stability.

Despite Australia's progressive gender policies, domestic violence remains a significant issue. Gender statistics from 2018 revealed that one in five women in Australia had experienced domestic violence. This paradox, often referred to as the "Nordic Paradox", highlights the contradiction between strong gender policies and persistent gender-based violence. While the Australian government has implemented comprehensive frameworks, such as the National Women's Strategy 2020-2030, to improve gender equality, societal and structural challenges persist.

In 2021, Australia strengthened its focus on combating domestic and sexual violence through the Australian Institute of Health. The policy framework aims to not only enhance gender equity within Australia but also influence gender policies across the Asia-Pacific region, including Indonesia. Similarly, Indonesia faces its own gender-related challenges. Cultural and structural barriers continue to limit women's access to education, political representation, and economic opportunities. Indonesia has made strides in gender mainstreaming, but challenges persist in addressing domestic violence, workplace inequality, and gender-based discrimination.

Australia's involvement in Indonesia's gender equality initiatives stems from a mutual interest in fostering regional stability and sustainable development. There are four primary motivations for Australia's engagement in Indonesia's gender policies:

#### **Enhancing Gender Equality for Sustainable Development**

Australia recognizes that gender equality plays a crucial role in economic growth, poverty reduction, and governance reform. By supporting Indonesia's gender initiatives, Australia contributes to improving women's welfare and independence while increasing their participation in politics, economics, and social affairs.

#### **Promoting Human Rights**

Gender equality is an integral component of human rights. Australia advocates for global gender justice and equity, reinforcing Indonesia's efforts in implementing gender-sensitive policies that align with international human rights standards.

### Strengthening Bilateral Partnerships

Australia and Indonesia share a strong diplomatic relationship, with gender cooperation serving as a key component of their broader bilateral framework. By investing in gender equality programs, Australia strengthens its strategic ties with Indonesia and fosters long-term regional cooperation.

### Mutual Economic and Political Benefits

Improving gender equality in Indonesia has regional implications for economic and political stability. Strengthening women's roles in entrepreneurship, corporate leadership, and governance not only benefits Indonesia but also contributes to a more stable and prosperous Southeast Asia, which is beneficial to Australia's trade and investment interests.

The MAMPU Program (Empowering Indonesian Women for Poverty Reduction) represents a significant collaboration between Australia and Indonesia. This initiative supports women's empowerment, promotes access to essential services, and strengthens grassroots advocacy. Dr. Kelly emphasized the importance of integrating religious perspectives into MAMPU, recognizing that faith-based approaches can influence gender norms and policies in Indonesia.

Additionally, Dr. Melissa's research (further exploration needed) investigates the intersection of extremism, violence, and gender discrimination. Findings from such studies contribute to shaping gender-sensitive policies that address underlying social issues contributing to domestic and structural violence.

Australia and Indonesia have taken various measures to achieve gender equality, adapting their policies and programs to their respective social, cultural, and economic contexts. Australia emphasizes a policy-driven approach with structured regulations, such as the National Women's Strategy 2020-2030, which focuses on women's well-being in various aspects of life. Additionally, policies like the Work from Home (WFH) Assessment during the COVID-19 pandemic highlight Australia's commitment to evaluating the gender impact of its policies.

In contrast, Indonesia faces more complex challenges in achieving gender equality, primarily due to social and cultural factors that still restrict women's roles in certain sectors. Despite government efforts, such as the MAMPU Program (Empowering Indonesian Women for Poverty Reduction) supported by Australia, challenges such as gender stereotypes, unequal access to education and economic opportunities, and low female representation in politics remain significant barriers.

The supporting and inhibiting factors for gender equality in both countries can be summarized in the following table:

**Tabel 1 Australia-Indonesia Gender Equality Initiatives: Policies and Challenges**

Aspect	Australia: "Policy Powerhouse"	Indonesia: "Cultural Shift in Progress"
Key Gender Policies	National Women's Strategy 2020-2030, National Plan to End Violence Against Women & Children	Gender Mainstreaming Policy, National Strategy on Women's Empowerment
Government Commitment	High - Regular evaluations every 5 years, integrated digital database (MyGov)	Moderate - Policy reviews exist but lack strong enforcement & digital integration.
Workplace Equality	Strong anti-discrimination laws, but the gender pay gap persists	Women's participation is increasing, but wage gaps & career barriers remain

<b>Healthcare Access</b>	Universal healthcare (Medicare) with equal access for all women	Public & private healthcare systems, but rural women face access challenges.
<b>Gender-Based Violence (GBV)</b>	One in five women experiences domestic violence despite strong policies (Nordic Paradox)	Cultural barriers limit GBV reporting; enforcement of protections is inconsistent.
<b>Bilateral Collaboration</b>	MAMPU program, women's leadership initiatives, regional influence	Australia supports policy development, training, & grassroots movements
<b>Future Focus</b>	STreat strengthening impact assessments, expand Asia-Pacific gender influence.	Increase policy enforcement, enhance economic empowerment for women.

Source: Author's analysis based on policy documents, interviews with experts, and reports on gender equality in Australia and Indonesia.

The comparison above demonstrates that Australia has more established regulations for promoting gender equality, whereas Indonesia continues to face structural challenges that require further reform. Nevertheless, cooperation between the two countries, particularly through initiatives like the MAMPU Program, presents a valuable opportunity to accelerate gender progress in Indonesia. While Australia's policies are systematically designed and undergo regular evaluations, Indonesia's policy implementation often encounters bureaucratic obstacles and limited civil society participation, which hinder its effectiveness. Australia's support, in the form of funding and gender-focused training for Indonesian women, has contributed to raising awareness and empowerment; however, additional measures are needed to ensure the long-term impact of these initiatives. Moving forward, Australia should strengthen its advocacy for gender policies across the Asia-Pacific region, particularly by ensuring that gender-based violence policies are effectively implemented in Indonesia. Meanwhile, Indonesia must work to increase female participation in decision-making, expand access to education and economic opportunities for women in remote areas, and accelerate legal reforms related to gender equality. For both countries, developing new cooperation models that extend beyond financial aid, focusing on knowledge transfer and technological advancements, could further enhance gender-based policies and create sustainable progress. Despite existing challenges, the bilateral partnership between Australia and Indonesia holds significant potential in fostering meaningful advancements in gender equality.

#### **Gender Perspective in Australia According to Several Doctoral Program Students from Indonesia**

The gender perspective in Australia, as observed by several Indonesian doctoral students, highlights the country's strong commitment to gender equality across various domains, including education, social policies, and workplace inclusivity. These insights, drawn from experiences within academic institutions and everyday life, reflect how deeply gender awareness is embedded in Australian society.

One significant observation concerns gender roles in early childhood education. In Australia, gender awareness is introduced at an early stage, with specific themes incorporated into educational curricula to help children understand the differences between social and sexual roles. The emphasis is not merely on biological distinctions but also on promoting gender equality in social interactions, responsibilities, and career aspirations. By integrating gender discussions into early education, Australian society aims to nurture a culture of inclusivity and mutual respect from childhood.



This approach is in stark contrast to many traditional educational systems, where gender roles are often reinforced through societal norms and expectations. In Australia, educational institutions encourage a more progressive view, ensuring that both boys and girls are exposed to equal opportunities and aspirations.

Another critical aspect of Australia's gender policies is its strong legal framework for the protection of women and children. Unlike in some countries where child welfare laws may be lenient or inconsistently enforced, Australia has stringent regulations that prioritize child safety and well-being. For instance, parents are legally prohibited from leaving their children alone at home. If neighbours report such incidents, they are incentivized with monetary rewards, while negligent parents face legal sanctions. This policy underscores the collective responsibility of society in ensuring child protection and safety.

Additionally, there is a strict privacy policy regarding children's images. Publishing photos of minors without explicit parental consent is prohibited, reflecting the country's commitment to protecting children from potential exploitation or misuse of their personal data. Such measures indicate the high level of concern Australia places on the rights and security of children, which could serve as a model for other countries seeking to improve their child protection policies.

Within academic institutions and professional environments, gender equality is strongly upheld. Universities in Australia, including the University of Western Australia (UWA), provide equal opportunities for both men and women to engage in academic discussions, employment, and research collaborations. There is no distinction between genders when it comes to access to education, career advancements, or leadership positions.

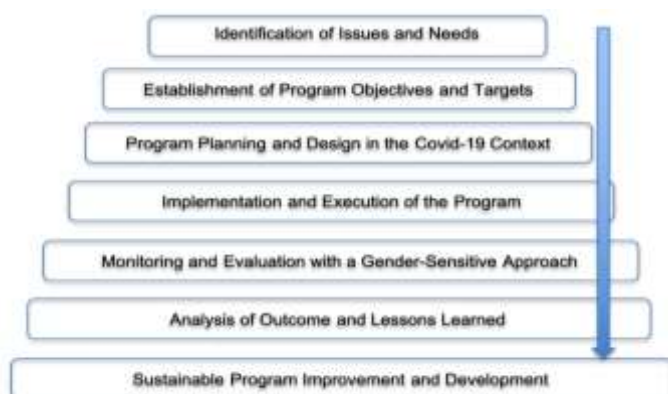
#### **Gender Equality Development Model in the Capable Program in the Covid-19 Era**

The development of gender equality within the MAMPU Program during the COVID-19 era requires a structured and adaptive model to ensure sustainability and effectiveness. The pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing gender inequalities, making it necessary to reframe gender-based initiatives with a more responsive approach. Based on the analysis, a gender equality development model has been formulated, incorporating key components that align with the Women in Development (WID) framework.

A critical first step in the model is identifying gender issues and needs, particularly concerning how COVID-19 has impacted women's access to health services, economic opportunities, education, and protection from violence. This aligns with WID's emphasis on understanding women's specific challenges in development contexts. The data-driven approach ensures that gender-responsive policies and programs address actual needs rather than assumed concerns.

To measure progress, monitoring and evaluation with a gender approach must be conducted regularly. Gender indicators such as economic inclusion, participation rates, and access to services should be used to assess the effectiveness of interventions. The WID framework supports the collection of gender-disaggregated data to measure policy effectiveness and make necessary adjustments.

The analysis of results and lessons learned plays a crucial role in ensuring that the program remains responsive to emerging gender challenges. Understanding the impact of MAMPU's strategies allows policymakers to refine future interventions and improve program effectiveness. This continuous assessment aligns with WID's principle of ensuring gender integration is an evolving process rather than a one-time implementation. Finally, continuous program improvement and development are necessary to maintain long-term gender equality efforts. The post-COVID-19 era presents new challenges and opportunities, requiring adaptive policies that build on previous experiences. Strengthening knowledge-sharing mechanisms, integrating technological solutions, and fostering cross-sectoral collaborations will enhance the sustainability of gender initiatives within the MAMPU Program.



**Figure 1: Framework for Strengthening Women's Empowerment and Resilience in the COVID-19 Era**

In conclusion, the gender equality development model for the MAMPU Program during the COVID-19 era must be dynamic and grounded in the WID approach. By systematically identifying gender issues, setting clear goals, ensuring active female participation, and continuously improving strategies, the program can achieve more sustainable gender equality outcomes. Figure 1 shows the steps that will help reinforce women's empowerment and resilience in the face of ongoing and future challenges.

### **Development Model in the MAMPU Program with Women in Development Theory**

The development of gender equality within the MAMPU Program during the COVID-19 era is highly relevant to the Women in Development (WID) theory, which emphasizes the need for integrating women into the development process while addressing gender disparities. The WID approach provides a strong foundation for structuring gender-focused initiatives by ensuring that women's roles, needs, and contributions are acknowledged and systematically incorporated into policy and program design.

One of the fundamental aspects of WID theory is the identification of gender issues and needs, which serves as the first step in developing an effective gender-responsive program. In the context of the MAMPU Program, this involves analysing the specific challenges faced by women due to COVID-19, such as increased vulnerability to domestic violence, economic hardships, and limited access to healthcare and education. Addressing these issues ensures that gender policies are tailored to the actual needs of women, rather than being based on general assumptions.

Following the identification phase, setting program goals and targets is crucial for narrowing gender gaps and fostering women's empowerment. WID theory underscores the importance of defining specific and measurable objectives that enhance women's roles in the development process. Within the MAMPU Program, these goals should focus on strengthening women's economic participation, improving access to essential services, and increasing female representation in decision-making processes (Kementerian PPN/Bappenas, 2022).

The next phase, COVID-era program planning and design, aligns with WID's emphasis on involving women actively in program formulation. Effective program design must integrate gender-sensitive strategies that address pandemic-related challenges, such as ensuring women's access to digital financial services, providing healthcare assistance, and mitigating the effects of economic downturns on female workers. By incorporating these strategies, the MAMPU Program can enhance its impact on gender equality. (Fitri Rahmawati et al., 2014).

Analysis of outcomes and lessons learned is another crucial element in integrating WID principles into the MAMPU Program. Evaluating program success and challenges enables policymakers to refine strategies, improve resource allocation, and strengthen gender mainstreaming efforts. This stage ensures that gender equality is continuously reinforced, even in times of crisis. (Simon & Trustisari, 2024).

Lastly, continuous program improvement and development are essential for sustaining gender equality efforts in the post-COVID-19 era. The WID framework encourages long-term commitment to addressing gender disparities by

continuously updating strategies based on evaluation results. For the MAMPU Program, this means incorporating emerging best practices, fostering knowledge-sharing platforms, and leveraging technological innovations to enhance gender-responsive policies.

By integrating Women in Development theory into the MAMPU Program's gender equality development model, the program can become more effective and sustainable in promoting women's empowerment. The structured approach—ranging from issue identification to continuous development—ensures that gender policies remain relevant, adaptive, and impactful in addressing both immediate and long-term gender challenges. Through this model, the MAMPU Program can play a pivotal role in accelerating gender equality in Indonesia, particularly in the face of global crises such as COVID-19.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The MAMPU Program's gender equality development model, when aligned with the Women in Development (WID) theory, serves as a powerful framework for addressing gender disparities, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. By systematically identifying gender issues, setting clear goals, and integrating gender-responsive strategies, the program not only mitigates the immediate challenges faced by women but also fosters long-term empowerment and inclusivity. The COVID-19 crisis has amplified existing gender inequalities, making it imperative for development initiatives to be adaptive, resilient, and sustainable. The structured approach outlined in this model—ranging from inclusive planning, active participation, gender-sensitive monitoring, and continuous improvement—ensures that women are not merely beneficiaries but active agents of change. A key takeaway from this study is that gender equality must be embedded in every aspect of policy and development. The MAMPU Program's ability to evolve and respond to gender-based challenges during crises underscores its role as a transformative force in achieving sustainable and equitable development. Moving forward, continuous program refinement, stronger institutional commitment, and collaborative efforts will be essential to solidifying gender equality as a cornerstone of Indonesia's development agenda. This model is not just a response to the pandemic—it is a call to action for policymakers, institutions, and society to prioritize gender justice, dismantle systemic barriers, and create a future where women's empowerment is not an aspiration, but a reality.

## ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Not applicable

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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