Interdisciplinary Social Studies
P-ISSN: 2808-0467
E-ISSN: 2808-5051

Eradicating Child Marriage in Sukabumi Through the Role of Plan International

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Keywords:
Plan International, Child Marriage, Sukabumi, Role of Non-Governmental Organizations, Service Delivery, Catalyst, Partnership

ABSTRACT

Child marriage is a serious violation of children's rights with far-reaching social, health, and economic consequences. In Indonesia, the practice remains prevalent, particularly in regions such as Sukabumi Regency, where rates of child marriage are among the highest. The research problem addressed in this study is understanding how non-governmental organizations (NGOs), specifically Plan International, contribute to reducing child marriage in this context. The objectives of this study are to examine the strategies employed by Plan International through its *Yes, I Do* program, to analyze the roles of partnership, service delivery, and catalytic interventions, and to evaluate the effectiveness of these interventions in Sukabumi between 2016 and 2020. This study employs a qualitative, descriptive approach, collecting data through interviews with stakeholders and a review of relevant literature and program documents. Findings indicate that Plan International, in collaboration with local and international partners, has actively contributed to reducing child marriage by establishing structures such as KPAD, Family Advocacy Desks (FAD), youth posyandu, educational modules, and business training programs. These interventions strengthened community awareness, improved service access, and empowered youth, demonstrating the NGO's catalytic and partnership roles as described by Lewis and Kanji. The study implies that coordinated programs involving multiple actors, supported by NGO facilitation, can effectively reduce child marriage, offering insights for policymakers, practitioners, and other NGOs seeking to implement sustainable child protection strategies.

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INTRODUCTION

The practice of child marriage, especially in Indonesia, remains rampant. Although the state, according to the 1990 Convention on the Rights of the Child, is obliged to protect and present child-friendly legislation or operational technical regulations, Indonesia is still unable to alleviate the practice of child marriage to the maximum (BPS, UNICEF, & PUSKAPA, 2020; Maharani et al., 2021). This is shown through UNICEF data in 2021, where Indonesia is ranked 14th in the world with 16.3% of women married before the age of 18 (UNICEF, 2021; Parsons et al., 2019). When examined more deeply, the author found that West Java is one of the provinces with a fairly high number of child marriages through the results of the 2015 Inter-Census Population Survey (SUPAS), with the highest absolute number reaching 273,300 child

marriages (PUSKAPA, 2020; Nasrullah et al., 2019; Hall et al., 2022; Handayani & Hidayah, 2020).

The high rate of child marriage in West Java is also a concern for the local government. For example, the Regent of Sukabumi, Marwan Hamami, has made policies on this matter, but until 2016, these policies still did not receive attention from some people (Putri & Raharjo, 2020). This condition arises due to the accumulation of various factors, such as low education levels, economic problems, lack of reproductive health services, and local social and cultural influences (Grijns et al., 2016; Hall et al., 2022; Bire et al., 2021). This has an impact on increasing the number of child marriages in Sukabumi Regency by 11.47%, where BPS noted that 59.76% of men and 73.54% of women aged 15-49 years had married in Sukabumi in 2019 (BPS, 2019; Utomo et al., 2021; Handayani & Hidayah, 2020).

This situation triggered various other parties outside the local government to participate in efforts to alleviate child marriage in Indonesia, especially in a number of regions in West Java. One of them is Plan International, an international non-governmental organization (INGO) whose main focus is centered on the struggle for children's rights and gender equality (Girls Not Brides, 2020; Amin et al., 2018). Through its extension organization in Indonesia, the Plan International Indonesia Foundation (YPII), they collaborate with the local government in compiling and executing a program called "Yes I Do" (Plan International, 2021; Peterman et al., 2020; van Reeuwijk et al., 2018; Utomo et al., 2021; Bire et al., 2021).

The *"Yes I Do"* program is implemented by YPII in three different districts, namely Sukabumi Regency, West Lombok Regency, and Rembang Regency. The program aims to prevent child marriage, teenage pregnancy, and practices harmful to the female reproductive organs that began in 2016 and ended in 2020. During this program period, Plan International, through YPII, succeeded in thwarting 32 cases of child marriage in the three districts, which constituted 24-32% of the total 168 cases of violence against children that were successfully reported to the Village Child Protection Group (KPAD).

This success is an important contribution that greatly helps the local government in alleviating child marriage (Kertati et al., 2023; Tolera, 2024). This was also conveyed by the Deputy Regent of Sukabumi, Adjo Sardjono, who stated that the *"Yes I Do"* program with YPII is a strategic initiative that can be leveraged to encourage the fulfillment of children's rights and family protection to realize a Child-Friendly Indonesia in 2030. This success is the background for the author to further examine the role of Plan International, through YPII, in implementing the *"Yes I Do"* program in the three districts during the period of 2016–2020. This urgency is strengthened because the success of the *"Yes I Do"* program not only contributes to the local government but also to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) targets on healthy and prosperous life, quality education, and gender equality, by ensuring that adolescents/girls complete 12 years of basic education without

being constrained by unwanted marriage or pregnancy (Rutgers WPF Indonesia, 2021).

Previous studies have examined efforts to reduce child marriage in Indonesia, but limitations remain in understanding the practical roles of international NGOs in localized interventions. For example, Grijns et al. (2016) analyzed socio-cultural and economic factors influencing child marriage in West Java, highlighting education, poverty, and cultural norms as key drivers. While this study provides a solid macro-level understanding of contributing factors, it does not explore how external actors like INGOs operationalize programs to mitigate child marriage. Similarly, Greene and Melnikas (2023; 2023) assessed government policies and community-based interventions in preventing early marriage, emphasizing legal frameworks and reproductive health services. However, their study is limited in scope regarding the effectiveness of NGO-led programs and partnerships with local institutions. These gaps highlight the need to investigate the roles, strategies, and impact of NGOs like Plan International in implementing child marriage prevention programs.

The aim is to explore how YPII collaborates with local governments and community actors to prevent child marriage, evaluate program effectiveness, and analyze its contribution to fulfilling children's rights and SDG targets. The study provides theoretical contributions to the literature on NGO roles in social change and practical insights for policymakers, local authorities, and NGOs on effective program design, partnership management, and strategies to sustainably reduce child marriage.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative research approach with a descriptive design to examine the role of Plan International through the *"Yes I Do"* program in reducing child marriage in Sukabumi. The qualitative approach was chosen to understand the phenomenon of child marriage and how Plan International addressed it through the program.

To maintain focus, the study was limited to the period of 2016–2020 and specifically examined Plan International's role through the *"Yes I Do"* program in Sukabumi. Data collection involved two methods: interviews and document analysis. Thirteen informants with diverse but relevant backgrounds to the *"Yes I Do"* program were interviewed. Secondary data were collected from journal articles, books, reports, news articles, websites, and other relevant documents.

The data included primary data (interviews) and secondary data (documents). Data analysis followed five stages: (1) collecting relevant data; (2) disassembling data by identifying and organizing substantive records; (3) reassembling or sorting the data; (4) interpreting the data and its meaning; and (5) drawing conclusions and suggestions based on the analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The success of Plan International through YPII can be achieved through a number of actions implemented during the "Yes I Do" program in Sukabumi. For example, YPII facilitated a number of villages within the scope of operation of the "Yes I Do" program in Sukabumi to form a Village Child Protection Group (KPAD) (Plan International Indonesia, 2020). In addition, YPII in collaboration with PKBM (community learning activity center) also facilitates children who drop out of school by forming the Association for the Improvement of Small Businesses (PUPUK) so that they can continue their education through certain skills training. (Rutgers WPF Indonesia, 2021) In fact, Plan International through YPII also oversees the legislation process in Sukabumi to be able to formulate regulations that regulate more strictly child protection in the 2017 Sukabumi Regional Legislation Program (Prolegda). This escort effort was realized through the ratification of Draft Regional Regulation Number 1 of 2018 concerning Child Protection in early 2018 which also included one of its clauses regarding child marriage. (Plan International Indonesia, 2020)

The series of actions taken then condensed into a number of roles that have been carried out by Plan International through YPII to smooth the achievement of the goals of the "Yes I Do" program. This is emphasized by David Lewis and Nazneen Kanji who define that a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) such as Plan International can be a new solution in solving various government problems as well as becoming the main actor of the third sector in the development landscape, human rights, humanitarian action, environment and other areas in public action where through "voluntary associations" that have a concern to change a certain environment in a particular context better David Lewis and Nazeen Kanji. To be able to articulate the role of NGOs such as Plan International or YPII, Lewis and Kanji in their book entitled "*Non-Governmental Organization and Development*" categorize the role of NGOs into 3 things, namely, *Service Delivery*, *Catalysis*, and *Partnership*. An NGO can only play one or three roles at a time when carrying out an action in achieving the organization's goals.

According to Lewis and Kanji, the first role of NGOs is *Service Delivery*. Broadly speaking, this role refers to NGOs mobilizing resources to provide goods and services as part of a program. This mobilization can take various forms with or without cooperation with the government, such as providing direct services to the community and providing training training to NGOs, the government and the private sector, through research and providing specialist input on training on an issue such as conflict.

This first role has been carried out by Plan International in the "Yes I Do" program in Sukabumi. Through YPII, they have provided direct services through the establishment of a number of community facilities, both in terms of child protection in general and specifically in the alleviation of child

marriage. For example, YPII facilitated a number of villages within the scope of operations of the "Yes I Do" program in Sukabumi to form the Village Child Protection Group (KPAD), the Association for the Improvement of Small Businesses (PUPUK), and the Village Children's Forum (FAD). With the procurement of a budget for YPII to run programs in Sukabumi of Rp.53,000,000, Plan International facilitates the establishment of these institutions in order to empower children and adolescents through skills education, the implementation of activities related to the Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (HKSR), to assistance in understanding and handling cases related to child marriage at a number of points in Sukabumi. (Plan International Indonesia, 2020)

The role of the Second NGO according to Lewis and Kanji is *Catalysis*. Broadly speaking, this role refers to NGOs making changes, both through advocacy and innovation to find new solutions to an issue. This role can be carried out through several things, namely advocacy, innovation, and supervision. Moreover, NGOs can become "*agents of change*" through efforts to change the paradigm in society through their programs.

This second role has been carried out by Plan International in the "Yes I Do" program in Sukabumi. Through YPII, they have been escorting the Sukabumi Prolegda since 2016 where at that time it did not contain child marriage. This escort resulted in the issue of child marriage included in the 2017 Prolegda, which finally passed Draft Regional Regulation Number 1 of 2018 concerning Child Protection in early 2018 which also included one of its clauses regarding child marriage. This effort continued with advocacy from the YPII team, through the "Yes I Do" program, to a number of villages in Sukabumi by involving elements such as KPAD, village/hamlet heads, and PKK groups to enforce local regulations related to child protection and child marriage, such as the Decree on the Formation of a Child-Friendly School Team and a Child-Friendly Teaching and Learning Activity Program (PKBM). (Plan International Indonesia, 2020)

The role of the three NGOs according to Lewis and Kanji is *Partnership*. Broadly speaking, this role refers to NGOs through cooperation with other actors, both governments, donors or the private sector where both parties share the benefits or risks of the cooperation established. Cooperation between NGOs and the government can help the government to deal with a certain problem where sometimes the government's programs or policies do not run well. The form of *partnership* can also be seen in cooperation between NGOs and other actors, both individuals and NGOs in the form of the establishment of *a Capacity Building* program to improve and strengthen the capabilities of NGOs or the targeted communities.

This third role has been carried out by Plan International in the "Yes I Do" program in Sukabumi. Through YPII, they have collaborated with the government such as the National Population and Family Planning Agency (BKKBN) and the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection

(KPPPA) as well as other organizations such as Rutgers WPF Indonesia and ARI (Alliance of Independent Youth) in running the "Yes I Do" program. In addition, they also collaborate with the Health Office in Sukabumi Regency through the Public Health Center (Puskesmas) to open a Youth Poly or Youth Care Health Service (PKPR) to build adequate services for adolescents' sexual and reproductive health rights (HKSR) and the elimination of child marriage. (Rutgers WPF Indonesia, 2021)

CONCLUSION

The high rate of child marriage in Sukabumi Regency prompted NGOs like Plan International, through YPII, to collaborate with the local government and stakeholders to implement the *"Yes I Do"* program, which introduced innovations and advocacy for child protection and reducing child marriage. Plan International's role was threefold: Service Delivery, Catalysis, and Partnership, resulting in special services for children and adolescents, support in investigating child marriage cases, and advocacy for relevant legislation. Future research could explore the long-term impacts of such NGO-led programs on community norms and legal enforcement to better understand their sustainability and scalability.

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