

# ANNUAL REPORT 2023



The  
Samdhana  
Institute





## Cover Photo:

Participants of the 3rd Jamboree Nusantara and the second Southeast Asia Youth Summit learned how to make traditional canang sari offerings. August 21, 2023, in Gobleg Village, Bali.

Indigenous woman conversation during the 2023 WEHRD Summit, Southeast Asia Women Environmental Human Rights Defenders (WEHRDs) Summit 2023. Held from 20-26 May 2023 in Pajinian Village in the West Adonara region of East Flores, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT).

Participants in Community Organizing (CO) Training at Fef District, Kab. Tambrau, Southwest Papua, 27-31 March 2023. This activity was attended by 40 participants representing 21 organizations/communities from Tambrau, Sorong, Sorong, Raja Ampat and Maybrat Regency.

20 years of Listening  
and Co-creating

# ANNUAL REPORT 2023



# CONTENTS

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE BOARD	5
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## OVERVIEW SAMDHANA@20 CELEBRATION

TWO DECADES OF LISTENING AND CO-CREATING: SAMDHANA CELEBRATES ITS 20 <sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY	10
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## PROGRAMMES ACCOMPLISHMENT 2023

GRANTSMAKING 2023	16
PROGRAMMES ACCOMPLISHMENTS 2023	20
EXTERNAL EVALUATION	25

## LISTENING AND CO-CREATING: PARTNERS' STORIES

TERRITORIAL APPROACH SUPPORTS INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES IN PAPUA	32
IPR REGISTRATION FOR KEIK KUOK MOI TRADEMARK	36
DEGEBDEB COMMUNITY BRINGS EDUCATION CLOSER TO HOME	39
FELLOW'S RETREAT 2023: REFLECTING ON TWO DECADES OF SAMDHANA	42



## Message from the CHAIRPERSON OF THE BOARD



**SURAYA AFIFF**  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES,  
SAMDHANA INSTITUTE

The central theme of our 20-year anniversary celebrations is listening and co-creating. What does this mean in practice, and how can reflecting on the past two decades help us prepare for the challenges that lie ahead in the next 20 years?

Samdhana has seen many changes over the past 20 years, but one thing has remained constant: transformative change, instead of development is only possible when people work together. So long as we continue listening to each other and co-creating equitable, planet-safe solutions, we can secure just transitions, economic equality, gender justice and social inclusion. The following report highlights some of our activities throughout this anniversary year to facilitate partnerships, create new ways of funding, harness collaborative potential and work with Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities in Southeast Asia.

Throughout our 20 years, collaboration has been key to making a difference. And the last year has been no exception. In 2023, we teamed up with Larantuka Social Economic Development Foundation (YASPENSEL) and Agro Sorghum Flores Foundation (YASHORES) to co-organise the Southeast Asia Women and Environmental Human Rights Defenders (WEHRD) Summit in Adonara, West Flores in Indonesia. Another landmark event brought together around 80 young leaders in the third Jamboree Nusantara gathering, held in tandem with the second Regional Youth Summit together with the Wisnu Foundation and Baga Raksa Alas Mertajati (BRASTI), with support from the Adat Dalem Tamblingan community in Bali.



BRASTI, a youth community that actively protect Alas Mertajati forest in Buleleng, Bali. Together with other youths from Southeast Asia who participated the Jamboree Nusantara 2023. (BRASTI/Elman)

# “FUNDING THE “UN-FUNDABLE”



Menuvu girls present their traditional dance during Samdhana staff immersion in their community in Southern Bukidnon, Philippines in August 2023. (SAMDHANA/Xenia)

We recently reflected on Samdhana’s first 20 years of work through an external evaluation; a candid and critical review. While we celebrate our strengths and acknowledge our weaknesses, we will continue to contemplate on how we take the recommendations forward into a very different future. Most importantly, it allowed us to affirm our role and responsibilities as a support organization, reiterating our commitment to support women’s groups, environmental and human rights defenders, youth organizations, Indigenous communities, grassroots institutions and local CSOs, all of whom are working to further the social and environmental movement in Southeast Asia. The external evaluation report is accessible through Samdhana’s website, [here](https://www.samdhana.org/sites/default/files/publication/051023_Final%20Samdhana%20Evaluation%20Report.pdf)<sup>1</sup>.



<sup>1</sup> [https://www.samdhana.org/sites/default/files/publication/051023\\_Final%20Samdhana%20Evaluation%20Report.pdf](https://www.samdhana.org/sites/default/files/publication/051023_Final%20Samdhana%20Evaluation%20Report.pdf)

In line with these commitments, we will continue to support partners, helping them access their basic needs such as water, food, healthcare and a healthy environment, as practical expressions of their right to their territory and self-determined development. In the process, we will continue to support organizations who lead in policy development, lobbying and advocacy, and increase Indigenous and local communities' capacities to defend their rights through conflict management, litigation and paralegal trainings. We will accompany communities who are ready to scale out their enterprises towards investing for impact that will enable social security for all in their territories. As always, collaboration will remain central to our approach. We encourage existing and new partners to be open, innovative and willing to learn from each other.

We will continue to find ways to “fund the unfundable”, reaching out to those who do not have access to formal financing and have been overlooked by donors or government agencies. We will expand and strengthen local giving, while also encouraging donors to recognise the contributions of local people in ensuring initiatives are effective and meaningful in the long term. We also recognize that beyond formally organized groups and networks, there is a broader public that all of us in the social and environmental movements should continue to influence. Now more than ever, there is a greater challenge to reach out to a wider public, because more people in the region need to understand and support the actions by local rights defenders and civil society.

We also need to reach out to other poor and marginalised communities, including those in urban areas which constitute the majority of

populations in Southeast Asia. The link between urban and rural ecosystems is clearer and more consequential than ever before, with natural disasters and climate change affecting everyone regardless of geographic or political boundaries. The health of our planet, the survival of our ecosystems and the wellbeing of society at large are all interconnected.

At present, [Gen Z<sup>2</sup>](#) constitutes the bigger percent of the population across the region. They have been born and raised in a digital environment, which is increasingly being shaped by technological advances in artificial intelligence (AI). This digital landscape will require inter-generational engagement, with Gen Z playing a pivotal role. As we set off on this journey together, we must ask ourselves: how does the social and environmental movement in general and Samdhana in particular remain active and effective in this increasingly digital world?

If we are to create a region where natural, cultural and spiritual diversity are valued, then listening and co-creating will remain critical. Only by working together can we overcome our shared challenges, help communities retain control over their territories and collectively contribute to the achievement of regional sustainable development goals (SDGs). Samdhana has made excellent progress in the past 20 years. By working together with partners and the wider public, we can accomplish so much more.

**Suraya Afiff**

Chairperson of the Board of Trustees  
Samdhana Institute

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/05/14/on-the-cusp-of-adulthood-and-facing-an-uncertain-future-what-we-know-about-gen-z-so-far-2/>





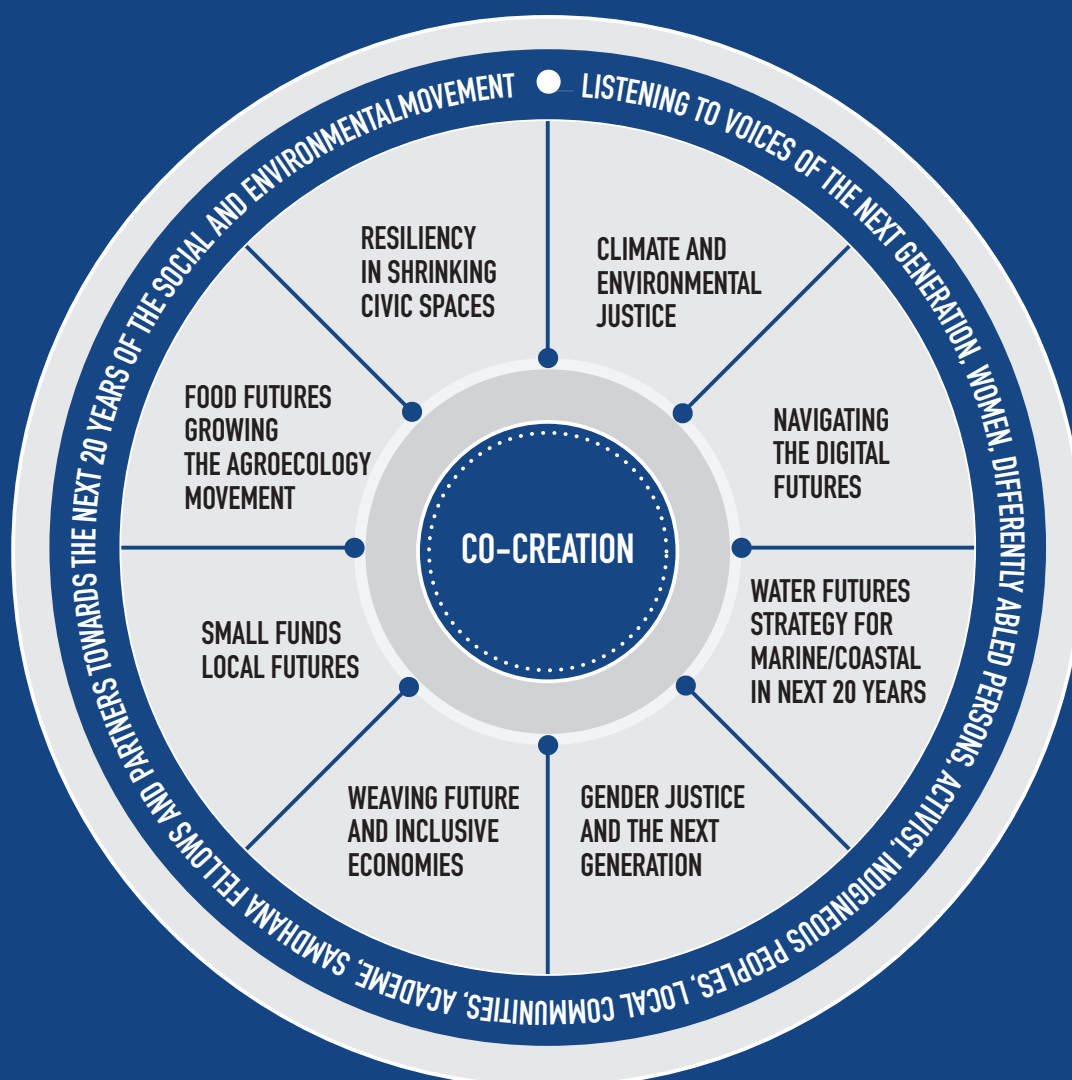
# Overview Samdhana@20 Celebration



# Two Decades of Listening and Co-creating: Samdhana Celebrates its 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

2023 marked the Samdhana Institute's 20th year since formal registration, and was also the halfway point in our 10-year strategic plan (2019-2028), making this the ideal juncture to look back on the past, while also planning for the future. Samdhana has come a long way from its humble beginnings in 2003, growing from small grantsmaking activities to the four present-day regional programmes, namely Grantsmaking, Capacity Development, Living Lifestance and Policy Development Support.

The thematic areas of Samdhana's listening and co-creating in celebration of our 20th year



This growth is the result of a collaborative effort. “When we go back to Samdhana’s role as a support organisation in the social and environmental movement, we cannot think of our accomplishments as simply our own,” explains Cristi Nozawa, Executive Director at Samdhana Institute. “Where we are now is, in large part, due to what community and grassroots partners have been doing – we have only supported them and helped them to grow,” she added.

Samdhana still has many stories to hear, to better round up lessons learned that came from adapting to the changes and challenges spanning the last twenty years. Looking ahead to the next two decades (2024-2044), co-creating will remain a central theme. Samdhana will set out its roadmap to reflect the realities and aspirations of various groups and communities, and continue co-creating with them to reshape the Southeast Asia region.

The overall objective of celebrating Samdhana’s 20th year is to listen to voices of the next generation, especially women, differently-abled persons, activists, Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, academics, Samdhana Fellows and partners, so we can collectively forge a path forward into the future of the social and environmental movement. With that in mind, we have held a number of listening and co-creating events as part of our 20th anniversary celebrations, which were co-organised with communities and NGO partners.

As part of listening, we organized the Regional Grants Advisers meeting in Chiang Mai, Thailand, in March 2023. This was our first face-to-face meeting after a three-year hiatus due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and also the first time that long-time advisers were able to meet with the newer members. This meeting brought together pioneers and individuals bringing fresh experiences and insights from diverse fields

and networks. The meeting provided the ideal platform for revisiting and renewing our shared understanding of the spirit and essence of small grantsmaking as ‘funding the un-fundable’, while also redefining and strengthening the ‘chain of trust’ within which we work. We also reiterated the importance of small grantsmaking as a mechanism for ‘match funding’ that can help communities to build on progress and overcome challenges, helping them on their way towards creating independent community funding of their own.

The Advisers shared their personal evaluation of how small grants can dramatically impact the lives of Indigenous communities, noting that it offers many people a way to regain their dignity. “Our grant support happens only during a very specific point in time in the life of a community,” explained Cristi Nozawa. “When given at the right time – for example, when the community has already mapped out its territory and they are already ready to lobby with the government – then the money becomes crucial for them to be able to cross to that next stage of their struggle,” she added. Over the past 20 years, Samdhana has utilised direct and flexible grantsmaking activities to put decision-making power into the hands of the community, entrusting them with management of funds and then encouraging them to utilise grants as initial seed funding for wider, more long-term initiatives.

On the subject of seeding positive impacts, last May saw the Women Environmental and Human Rights Defenders Summit (WEHRDS), held in West Adonara District, East Flores Regency, Indonesia. This event connected women defenders from across Southeast Asia through stories, seeds and solidarity – three things that the women and other participants shared together during the event. You can read more stories from Adonara [here](#) and [here](#).

## CO-CREATING WITH THE NEXT GENERATIONS OF ACTIVISTS



Youth shared information and experiences related to food production, the education system, their vision and connection with each other. During the 3rd Jamboree Nusantara and the second Southeast Asia Youth Summit, August 21, 2023, in Gobleg Village, Bali. (BRASTI/Elman)

We could not look forward to the next 20 years of the social and environmental movement without reflecting on the importance of young people in the present. With this in mind, we must ask ourselves: how can we support the next generation, so that they do not repeat the mistakes that we have experienced in our time? How can we support young activists on their journey and help them reach their destination?

In search of answers to these questions, some Samdhana Fellows, members of the Board and several key partners visited the Earthrights Mekong School in Chiang Mai, Thailand, from 28-29 April 2023. Here they listened and learned how Earthrights have been preparing young people to combat a variety of issues, including climate change, corporate human rights abuses and corruption. It was also an opportunity to spend time with a community partner in Thailand and learn about their struggles and strategies in retaining rights to their customary forest. This experience provided Samdhana Fellows with the inspiration and the information they needed to kick-start a new project: conceptual development planning for a new school, intended specifically for the next generation of community and climate activists.

In Indonesia, the Jamboree Nusantara and the second Regional Youth Summit gathered 244 young people together to exchange ideas, play and learn together. Held in August 2023 at the Adat Dalem Tamblingan, Catur Desa in Bali, the event explored how Indigenous heritage influences the environmental stewardship of the Dalem Tamblingan people, particularly in their protection of the two sacred lakes that are also important sources of water in the Balinese traditional rice farming system (*subak*).

The Jamboree was a platform for exchanging stories, sharing lessons learned and raising awareness of cultural heritage in other countries. Through group-based reflection sessions, it spotlighted many of the issues affecting young people in countries throughout Southeast Asia, and gave inspiration on how other youth and community groups innovated appropriate solutions. Some of the ideas generated included an ecotourism initiative based around forest trekking, and research into medicine, food and other benefits communities derive from forests. Discussions also laid the groundwork for capacity-building activities and development among Indigenous youth groups. The week-long gathering resulted in a shared commitment to take action and support youth activism.



## FRIENDRAISING

Self-sustainability is an important aspiration for any organization. Samdhana has been proactively increasing popular support for the work we do with Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities through a series of public fundraising events that began in 2021. This recently culminated in the launch of 20@20, one of our fundraising and conservation initiatives in the Philippines, which sets out to plant 20,000 trees in an area spanning 20 hectares and with support from 20 communities.

To date, fundraising events for this forest restoration and conservation project have garnered support from 60 partners and communities, many of whom accompanied us in a series of collaborative tree-planting events in August 2023, spanning the Philippines and Papua, Indonesia. Some of these partners have been supporting us since 2021, in restoring the forest area in Mt. Hablaon, in Awang, Opol, Misamis Oriental, together with the Higaonon tribe community organization, Panaghiusa sa mga Higaonon sa Awang (PAHINA). To date, there are approximately 4,500 seedlings that have been planted in Mt. Hablaon over a period of three years, with a survival rate of 60%.



## FELLOWS RETREAT

In September 2023, Samdhana held the Fellows Meeting, part of our commitment to work with current and future generations to realise our vision for diversity and well-being in the Southeast Asia region. A few partner youth groups were invited to share their own personal experiences and stories of the collective struggles of their communities, and express their hopes for the future. Recurring themes included the need for healing, revisiting the past to shape the future, interconnectedness, finding our roots and literally grounding ourselves in the soil.

This meeting looked back on and celebrated the last 20 years of the Samdhana Fellowship, while also charting a course for its future. This included the creation of a new Fellows Committee and Programme Committee, which will be devoted to supporting young activists in their ongoing struggle.



## STAFF RETREAT

Another memorable event was a staff retreat, held over two days in August 2023 in partnership with the Menuvu Kirenteken-Ilantungen community in Southern Bukidnon, the Philippines. All Samdhana staff, from Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar and the Philippines, were welcomed with a ritual intended to strengthen our ongoing partnership. The event was another valuable opportunity to interact with youth groups, women and community leaders. Everyone had something to share with their new friends. One Indonesian colleague noted the similarity between these rituals and those of their hometown. A number of staff also said that they understood better what Samdhana aims to do when they listened to the stories of the community.

This event, like the many others hosted by Samdhana, helped to strengthen collaborative networks around shared experiences, while also centering the voices and aspirations of Indigenous communities in our plans for the future. From start to finish, listening and co-creating remained integral to every step of the process. In addition to the above various events have been organised with Samdhana partners at the community level, integrated with regular programme implementation throughout the year.



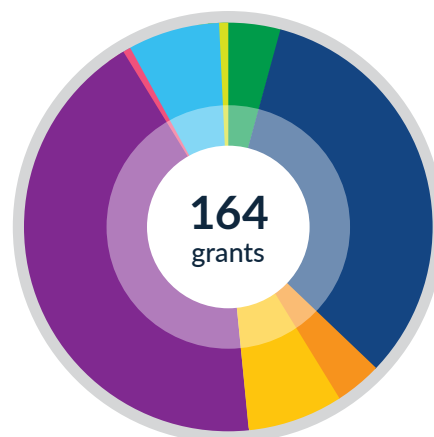


# Programmes Accomplishment 2023



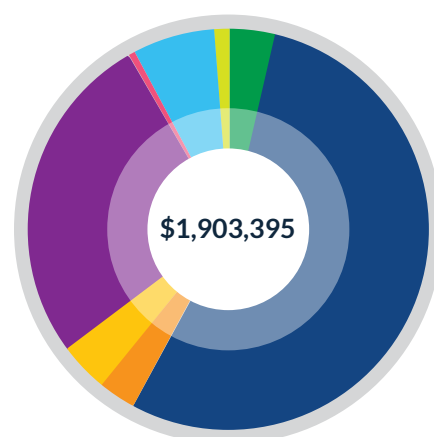
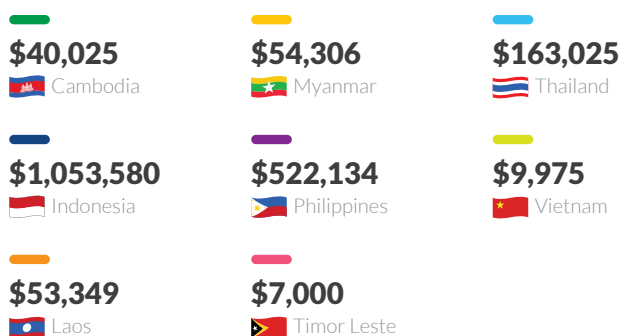
# GRANTSMAKING 2023

We processed a total of 164 grants across Southeast Asia region, and in Timor Leste for the fiscal year 2023.



Number of grants approved by country, 2023

The total amount of the approved grants is US \$1,903,395. Partners in Indonesia received the highest amount of funding, followed by Partners in the Philippines.



Grants amount distributed across countries, 2023, in US\$

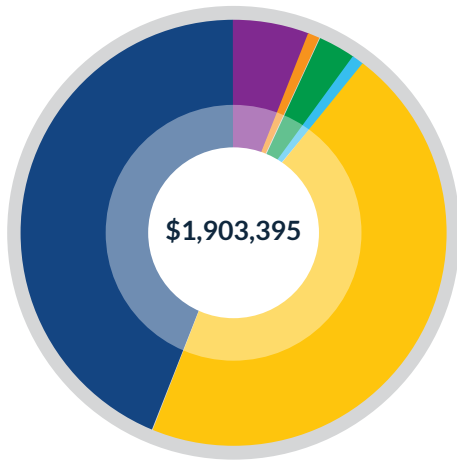
We have 151 distinct Grantee-Partners in 2023. Seven of them received more than one grant for this fiscal year. Indigenous Peoples-led organizations or communities, including IP women- and IP youth-led organizations make up 56% of the partners, while CSOs make up 44%. Among the CSOs, three are from academe and three are faith-based organizations.

Less than one-fifth or 19% of the Grantee-Partners are women-led, both IP and non-IP.

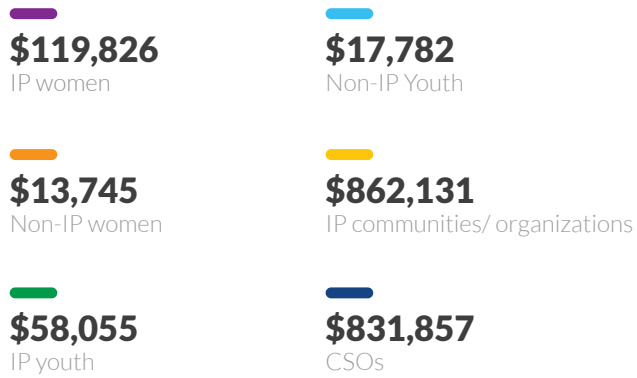
**151 distinct**  
Grantee-Partners in 2023

**56% partners**  
Indigenous and  
local communities

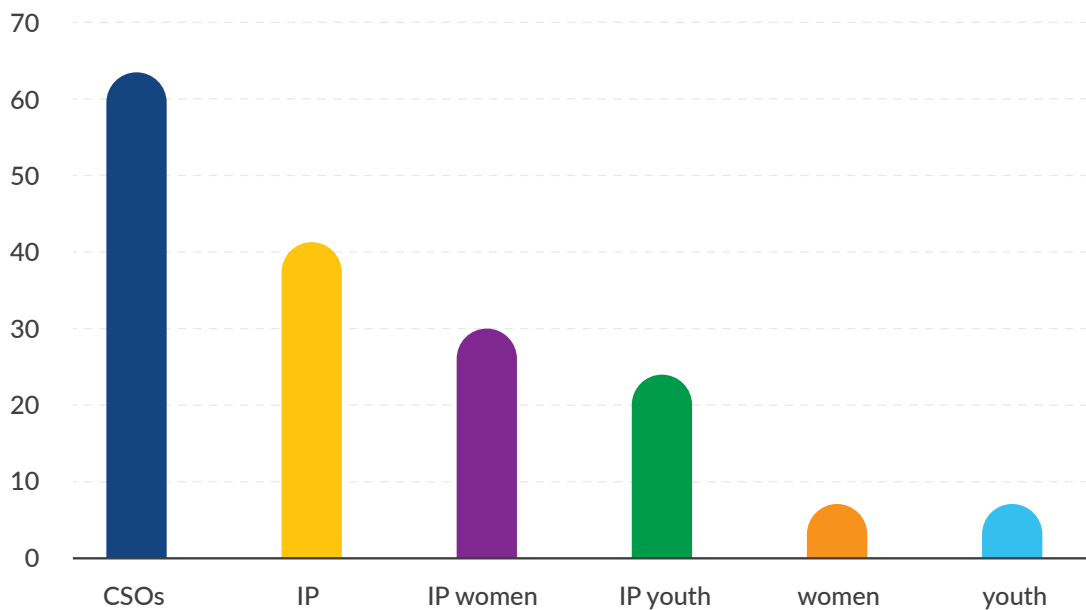
**44% CSOs**  
Academe and faith-based  
organizations



Distribution of funds across the Grantee-Partners, 2023 in US\$



Distribution of Grantee-Partners, 2023



Samdhana clusters the different kinds of work that Grantee-Partners do under broad thematic areas. For this fiscal year, the most number of grants supported work with, and for the Next Generation or young people. This includes training for young farmers, young entrepreneurs and facilitators, training for documentation and others. This is closely followed by work on tenure rights, mostly for Indigenous Peoples. However, these number of grants translate to only 10% of the total amount of funding disbursed for this year.

Work on tenure rights still received the highest amount of grant funding at US \$870,878, almost half or 46% of the total funding we disbursed. Grants for mitigating and adapting to climate change supported international lobbying for Loss and Damage, which makes up 14%. Similarly, funding for governance and leadership development is pegged at the same percentage. This includes institutional support to local organizations, some of which continue in the process of strengthening their organizations and recalibrating strategies as part of the recovery from COVID pandemic. Urgent action grants made up only less than 4% of the total funding disbursed for this year.



Distribution of Grants per thematic area, 2023



**\$258,394**  
Mitigating and Adapting to Climate Change

**\$924,141**  
Tenure Rights

**\$31,372**  
GEDSI

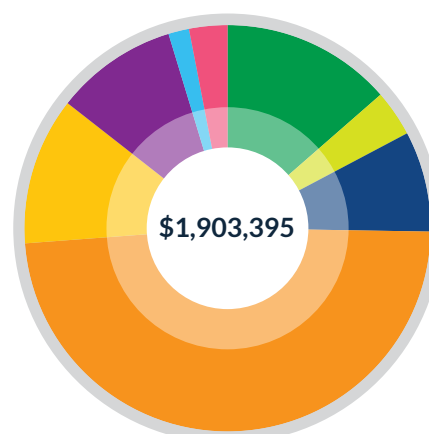
**\$70,102**  
Living Economy

**\$223,644**  
Natural Resource Governance

**\$57,987**  
Urgent Action Grant

**\$152,332**  
Next Generation

**\$185,424**  
Governance and Leadership Development



Amount of grant support per thematic area of work, in US\$, 2023

In 2023, 83% of our grantsmaking is still on the micro and flexible grants. We made five medium sized to large grants that amounted to 47% of the total funding support given out.

	# of grants	Total US \$
micro grants ranging from US\$ 500-9999	135	592,546
small grants ranging from US \$ 10000 - 29999	24	422,191
medium grants US\$ 30000 and above	5	888,658
<b>Total</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>1,903,395</b>

In addition, Samdhana provides technical support to community partners through service contracts with expert individuals and other NGOs who work directly with IPLC partners on areas like mapping, research and assessment, business plan development, and other technical needs. In the fiscal year 2023, the service contracts amounted to US \$405,956.

Our Grantsmaking work is being supported by the following Donor-Partners in FY 2023

- Global Greengrants Fund
- Ford Foundation
- Climate Land Use Alliance (CLUA)
- Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
- Netherlands MOFA (FGG)
- ICONIQ Capital
- Tenure Facility for AMAHUTA
- Fundo CASA

Photo by SAMDHANA/Dika



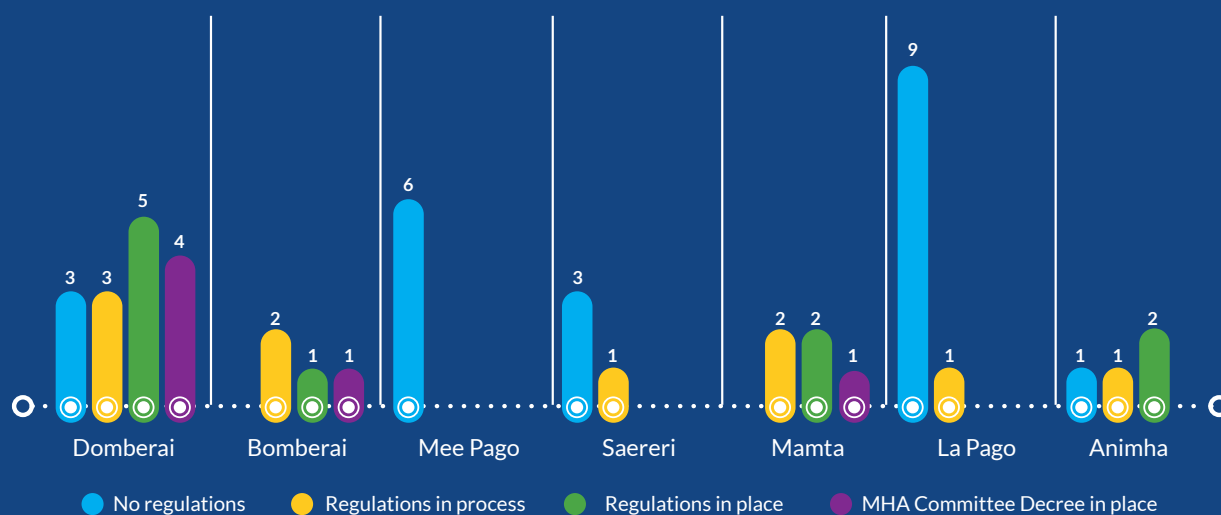
Photo by INFIS/Fachrudin

# Programmes Accomplishments 2023

## ADVANCING TENURE RIGHTS

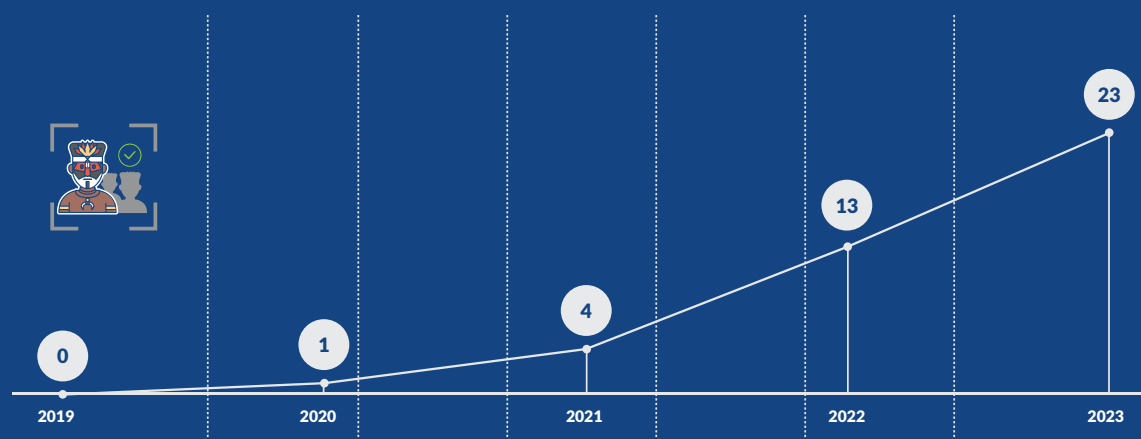
In 2023, Samdhana continued working closely with communities, local and national NGOs, and with representatives of district and provincial governments. During this reporting period, we tracked progress in the legal recognition of land tenure rights for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) in Papua, Indonesia. Results are presented in the graph below ([Table 1](#)).

Table of regulations recognising Indigenous Peoples in Papua



The availability of mapping services and the territory maps have helped to expedite the recognition of IPLCs and their territories.

Recognition of Indigenous People by local governments by year in Papua



Specifically in Wamena, Samdhana provides policy development support through collaboration with various institutions. This includes the Customary Area Registration Agency, or Badan Registrasi Wilayah Adat (BRWA); the Urban and Regional Development Institute (URDI); local NGO Panah Papua; and the Walesi (YBAW). In addition, Samdhana works closely with 91 local government units at the regional and provincial level to prepare the necessary documents for the recognition of Indigenous Peoples' customary territories. Samdhana is currently working to secure tenure rights covering 3.9 million hectares of IPLC territories, with 1.1 million hectares (28%) already legally recognised and 2.8 million hectares (72%) of land mapped out by the communities still pending official recognition from the government.

Through policy development support, Samdhana works with other institutions such as the BRWA, and ...

91

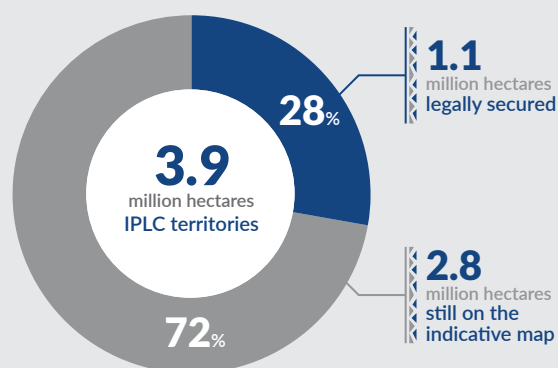
local  
government  
units

8

Ministries

to prepare the documentary requirements of Indigenous peoples for the recognition of their customary territories.

At present Samdhana is supporting work for tenure security of



Mama Fami, founder of Sanggar Keik Kuok Moi since 2005, showing cloth with Moi tribe motif. (SAMDHANA/Rizqiah)

## LIVING ECONOMY

In supporting self-sufficient food production for IPLCs, we embrace the concept of 'AgroECu' – agroecology in harmony with culture. To date, a total of nine AgroECu learning farms have been established among Menuvu Kirenteken-Ilantungen and Higaonon communities in Northern Mindanao, Philippines.



Community local farmers planting "tinigib" seeds - Balintad, Baungon, Bukidnon. (SAMDHANA/Xenia)

## BUMMA

The journey to establish enterprises owned by Indigenous Peoples, or Badan Usaha Milik Masyarakat Adat (BUMMA), in Papua is as long and challenging as the roads that connect one village to another. 2023 marks a critical first step in this journey, with the creation of two such enterprises in Namblong and Mare. Moving forward, our shared aim is for them to manage their common assets effectively, including consumer goods, eco-tourism and an Indigenous-owned carbon project.

These two organisations will collectively manage over 100,000 hectares of land and forest, with BUMMA Namblong responsible for the four legally recognised customary forests contained within the 53,000 hectares of their territory. The development process in Namblong had been led by the DAS (Dewan Adat Suku, or tribal council) together with its subsidiary, ORPA Namblong (Organisasi Perempuan Adat, or Indigenous Women's Organization of Namblong), and various other groups and individuals.

In April 2023, 29-year-old Yohana Tarkuo was elected by all 44 clans of Namblong to become the Chief Executive Officer of BUMMA Namblong. With support from tribal elders and the Mitra BUMMA team, she has since vindicated their decision by demonstrating her leadership capabilities, communicating effectively and providing strategic direction to her team, while also continually motivating her community to build their BUMMA.

In the Mare tribe, the first-year inventory of the tribe's 50 clans has been completed, with 30 of these clans agreeing to join BUMMA Mare. Data collected in this process also played a pivotal role in the regulations supporting the legal recognition of the Mare tribe and others in the Maybrat district.

## BUMMA in Tanah Papua in 2023, at a glance



**60+**

**Community consultations conducted**



**26**

indigenous and local communities in Papua

**Suppliers and vendors included in BUMMA supply chain**



**64**

individuals

**People with access to healthcare provided through BUMMA**



**800**

**Individuals involved in BUMMA development**



**Legal framework for BUMMA-owned carbon and ecosystem projects developed**



**BUMMA Namblong established to support local products and ecotourism initiatives**

## WOMEN-LED CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

*"We can lead a happy and fulfilling life when trees are conserved, farms are protected, food resources are secured and families remain together. There is a meeting hall in our community now and we are happy to have been officially recognised by the government."*

*from a Memeritan (woman) of the Menuvu tribe, participant during the paralegal training in Bukidnon, Philippines*

In 2023, we increased our support for local Indigenous women in Southeast Asia, especially in the Philippines, Indonesia and Laos, helping them gain access to justice and legal recourse by providing various forms of capacity development and connecting victims of harassment or abuse to lawyers groups. We continue to increase community capacities through the Social Justice Leaders program and Women Environmental and Human Rights Defenders (WEHRD) program.

Activities such as paralegal training, right advocacy throughout the year have helped build women's capacity in important areas, women's and Indigenous Peoples' rights, leadership development, and advancing social inclusion.

As we observe, these are important building blocks they need to strengthen resilience in their communities. These capacities abet women to secure traditional food sources; obtain intellectual rights for traditional weaving designs, textile art, cultural knowledge and stories; support enterprise development; and facilitate environmental stewardship.



Indigenous women are sharing their aspirations at the 2023 WEHRD Summit. (SAMDHANA/Sandika)

# External Evaluation

In late 2022, Samdhana contracted an external consultant team to conduct an institutional evaluation on two levels: First, on the Dedicated Grant Mechanism - Indonesia (DGM-I) project; and second, on the programmes and other grant projects of the Samdhana overall. The evaluation was conducted until the first quarter of 2023. This process helped to assess progress and highlight achievements, while also identifying issues and challenges, evaluating project implementation effectiveness and formulating recommendations for future work. The evaluation featured a combination of desk review, interviews with personnel, community and CSO partners, donor organizations, and

other stakeholders (in person, via email and over the phone), field visits and focus group discussions (FGD).

Here we share the main takeaways from the report, including strengths, achievements and areas for improvement. The report has been presented to Samdhana staff, Board members, Fellows and key Partners. Where specific recommendations were provided by the evaluation team, the subsequent management response from Samdhana has also been included, along with details of relevant action plans. The full report is available via our website.



# 01



## ACHIEVEMENTS

Over the past decade, Samdhana has gained recognition in the countries where it operates and built trust among its stakeholders, including NGOs and local and national governments. In Indonesia, Samdhana is trusted by the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, who often involve them in assisting other NGOs and as a resource in their networks, especially on promoting tenure security rights.

Samdhana has also collaborated with various ministries to support community-based organisations at the grassroots level. Similarly, in the Philippines, Samdhana has been a key supporter of national lobbying campaigns addressing land rights issues, and facilitating local dialogues with Indigenous groups and concerned agencies. They have also played a significant role in promoting traditional food security systems that are highly valued by Indigenous Peoples in the Philippines, Thailand, Laos and Indonesia. Several exchanges of heritage seeds and traditional crops or plants have already taken place between neighboring communities.

### The conclusion is as follows:

Overall, Samdhana has made commendable progress in achieving its institutional targets and strategic objectives, particularly in the Policy Development Support Programme, in addition to the Living Litespace, Capacity Development, and Grants Programmes.

Samdhana has also shown steady growth in supporting IPLCs and CSOs through grants. Financial management capacity has improved,

with timely submission of donor financial reports and some partners enhancing their financial systems. Human resources support has shown mixed results, with progress in certain areas but unmet targets in others.

Samdhana has successfully maintained funding levels and raised additional resources. More attention is needed in grants processing, financial management systems, and human resources support. By addressing these gaps and building on successes, Samdhana can enhance its effectiveness and impact in supporting IPLCs and CSOs in Southeast Asia.





## GENDER EQUALITY, DISABILITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION (GEDSI) MAINSTREAMING

Samdhana has grants for disability rights groups, which are used to develop capacity and enhance micro enterprises, along with other initiatives. However, persons with disabilities (PWDs) or ‘diffables’ who participate in grant projects and programme activities have not been mainstreamed. Based on Indonesian Law No. 8/2016 on Disabilities, article 53 states that diffable staff should account for at least 2% of the total workforce in government and other government institutions – the equivalent requirement in private companies is just 1%. This can be a way forward for Samdhana’s recruitment policy as an organisation, even though Samdhana is not a government institution or private company. It is important to prioritise disabled recruitment as a step towards inclusion.

Samdhana’s partners and beneficiaries include women, youth and IPLCs. Positive outcomes include empowering young leadership, improving project management capacity, revitalising cultural practices related to food security, conservation and land rights, and instilling confidence among women.

Who is excluded? Excluded groups from Samdhana’s initiatives comprise isolated and hard-to-access IPLCs currently without partnering facilitation. In the Philippines, Indigenous Peoples outside the Ancestral Domain Area have been excluded. Solutions are needed for groups with good forest areas.



## CHALLENGES

Samdhana grants have had a significantly positive impact on partner communities. However, there are challenges associated with the grants’ design, including the absence of outcome indicators and short contract durations.

### Other challenges include:

The need for strategists in Samdhana offices, particularly in Indonesia, to integrate initiatives for IPLCs. Disseminating IPLC voices internationally and within each country is vital. Collaboration between NGOs in Indonesia and the Philippines promotes mutual learning for IPLCs.

Philippine partners expressed challenges, such as lack of advocacy lawyers, and face limitations in education and public interest litigation. Indonesian partners struggle with inconsistent government commitment and weak community self-reliance. They also lack regular partners or donors for institutional development. For example the Don’t Stop Dream Team (DSDT), an NGO in Laos, faces challenges in managing their movement, limited youth registration, experience and unsupportive government policies.

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**Management response:** A litigation fund has been established in the Philippines to provide access to legal services. Institutional development support has been provided to Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) and selected solidarity movements in the region and funds are being raised to make institutional support more readily available to local CSOs across Indonesia.

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The Philippines staff highlighted challenges including consolidating outcomes from various projects and programmes, setting clear targets, limitations in advocacy work and providing legal or paralegal assistance. They also mentioned the need to facilitate favourable policy development and unite communities into a social movement, which is still a learning process.

In Indonesia, staff pointed out issues related to project management, emphasising the importance of managing projects synergistically to avoid focusing solely on outputs. They also mentioned the impact of unchecked conflicts of interest on organisational progress, such as project leaders providing benefits to their own family members (nepotism), or a community-based organisation only dealing with their own family members as project beneficiaries. Other barriers mentioned include collaborating with consortium partners with different perspectives, navigating the political situation during elections, limited donor support as a developing country and the need for more inclusive practices.

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***Management response:** An updated Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) system will be put in place, including a simplified set of targets, outputs and indicators. Listening and co-creation will continue to be practiced beyond 2023 to ensure improved collaboration and social inclusion in all programmes and projects. The annual Samdhana partners' meeting will be geared towards improving sensitivity and responsiveness to the changing political climate across the region.*

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### Grievance Mechanism

Samdhana's grievance mechanism includes the use of their website and other communications channels with facilitators and staff. However, some parties (especially remote partners) prefer not to use the website. Communicating grievances to facilitators can be difficult, despite the trust that has been built. Some partners have raised concerns about transparency in budget allocation, resource sharing, overclaiming and communication issues, which has affected their relationship with Samdhana.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Strengthen the overall movement towards achieving strategic objectives, including building a Trust Fund to reduce donor funding dependency.

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***Management response:** Additional channels to express grievances will be introduced by the end of 2024, particularly for partners in remote areas who would prefer not to use the website. As part of our efforts to achieve greater transparency, Samdhana will review the presentation of its annual financial report within the next two years, in order to better reflect how and why funds are allocated to different partners. As a member of Alianza Socio-ambiental Fondos del Sur, we are required to allocate at least 50% of our funds to support our partners. From this year onwards, more regular and open communications will be practiced with strategic/consortium partners.*

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- Influence national, provincial and local policies for IPLCs' security of tenure and well-being; engage through strategic media, lobbying and various other approaches.

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***Management response:** Samdhana will continue to help partners influence national, provincial and local policies related to tenure security and community well-being. Through the Lifespace Programme, which covers Northern Mindanao and Calamianes in the Philippines and Tanah Papua in Indonesia, Samdhana intends to be more engaged with local governments. In the Philippines, we are establishing a partnership with the National Organic Agriculture Program of the Dept. of Agriculture to promote traditional food systems; in Indonesia, we work with KomNas HAM and the Ministry of Forestry to facilitate the recognition of customary territories or customary forests, while also engaging with the Ministry of Education and Culture to support traditional schools (sekolah adat).*

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- Increase replication of successful approaches between grantees or villages, informed by lessons learned. Also, consider opportunities for replication between countries.

**Management response:** Cross-learning or exchanges, when possible, will be supported amongst partners from 2024 onwards. Documentation of case stories will continue as part of knowledge management. The partners meeting will be convened every year to allow for learning exchanges and network development among partners.

- Increase the scale of funding and improve the timeline for grants management, measure staff workload and the number of projects.

**Management response:** Consortium and strategic partners now get more than the original micro-grants if and when funding is available. Additional human resources will help ease the workload, while also improving staff planning and management skills.

- Capacity building for Samdhana staff and partners is needed, with the involvement of Fellows to address these matters.

**Management response:** Capacity development needs assessments for staff will be conducted in mid-2024, with results incorporated into the design of organisational human resources planning.

- Facilitate Fellows contribution to Samdhana and build effective communication.

**Management response:** Two Fellows Committees have been established as per a Samdhana Board decision, and they are now beginning to operate. A Fellows Coordinator has been on board since May 2024, to facilitate Fellows' contributions and improve communications.

- Finding a good communicator or a strategic team for the Samdhana office, especially in Indonesia, that can represent partners' initiatives and voices from around Southeast Asia at international and national fora, while also reflecting IPLCs needs and aspirations

to create enabling environments for each country and promote the well-being of IPLCs; and to address communication issues with some big NGOs.

**Management response:** As we enter a new era in Indonesia, a strategy in the Lifespace Programme in Tanah Papua is being updated to ensure partners' initiatives are integrated. Consultations with strategic and consortium partners are already underway; the Samdhana team conducted a series of consultations with Partners (in Papua) from November 2023 to March 2024 and are currently in the process of writing the Papua Strategy, which will be shared with the Partners by the end of June 2024. Samdhana continues to support local partners and amplify the voices of IPLCs and local civil society, in order to influence the enabling environment at various levels.

- Samdhana can mainstream people with disabilities to become partners and benefit from projects, and also in staff recruitment. Samdhana needs to find ways to reach out to excluded groups, especially when they have good forest resources.

**Management response:** Two staff training sessions on Gender Equality, Disability (or diffable/differently abled) and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) were conducted in May and August 2023, for Indonesia and the Philippines-Mekong operations respectively. The latter office has also undertaken an institutional gender audit, which resulted into the gender mainstreaming action plan that will be implemented in the coming years. Meanwhile more GEDSI training has been organised and scheduled for the various projects and programmes, to ensure that this is embedded in each of Samdhana's initiatives. This began with testing of the GEDSI module in Ambon from 11–14 October 2023, and continued with GEDSI training for partners in Jayapura from 16–18 May 2024.

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# Listening & Co-creating: Partners' Stories



# Cultural Areas Approach Supports Indigenous Communities in Papua

By: Naely Himami

Papua is a region in Indonesia where traditional community values remain strong. There are more than 300 recognised tribes on the island of Papua, all of whom live according to a set of rules and cultural norms that have been passed down from one generation to the next. In order to honour this wisdom and provide a framework for implementing our support in Papua, we crafted the Samdhana Papua Strategy in 2018.

This strategy features a territorial approach based on the seven cultural areas of Tanah Papua which are recognised by the Indonesian Government. The seven cultural areas in this region are as follows:

- 1 *Domberai* (Sorong Regency, South Sorong, Maybrat, Tambrau, South Manokwari and Arfak Mountains);
- 2 *Bomberai* (Fakfak, Teluk Bintuni and Kaimana districts);
- 3 *Saireri* (Biak Numfor, Yapen, Waropen, Supiori, Teluk Wondama and Nabire districts);
- 4 *Mee Pago* (Paniai, Dogiyai, Deyai, Intan Jaya and Mimika districts);
- 5 *La Pago* (Jayawijaya, Lani Jaya, Central Mamberamo, Tolikara, Puncak, Puncak Jaya, Yahukimo and Tolikara districts);
- 6 *Mamta Tabi* (Jayapura, Sarmi, Keerom and Mamberamo Regencies); and
- 7 *Animha* (Merauke, Boven Digoel, Mappi and Asmat Regencies).

To implement this strategy, a team of Samdhana staff and local NGO partners are helping two implement participatory action plans in each customary territory. In line with Papua communities' needs, they focus on both tenure and livelihood work, addressing issues and

helping to co-design solutions. Each team's scope of speciality include community organisation, youth engagement and women's inclusion; persons with disabilities; business development; community entrepreneurship; mapping, planning and action; research participation; and legal and policy work.

The creation of the farmers' market in Yaf Kayam, which facilitates the sale of natural products made by the local community, is one story that shows the promise of the Papua strategy to improve the standards of living of *masyarakat adat* or Indigenous Peoples in Tanah Papua.





The Yaf Kayam farmer's market helps farmers market their agricultural harvest, such as taro. (KAOEM TELAPAK/Wisnu)



## YAF KAYAM FARMERS GROUP IN WERTAM

The Yaf Kayam Farmers Group was established in 2021 by the villagers in Wertam Village, Tambrau, Southwest Papua. They set up their own half-hectare cooperative plantation (*kebun kelompok*), where they began to cultivate daily essentials like onions, chilies, cabbage and tomatoes. In the beginning, they struggled to grow enough produce to support their food requirements, but now, with support from Samdhana, and consortium partner Kaoem Telapak, that is beginning to change.

Working through the PERMATA Project, Samdhana and Kaoem Telapak (KT), a non-governmental organisation (NGO), developed a program to enhance agricultural production capacity and improving food security of the community.

Kaoem Telapak works on environmental issues such as forestry, agriculture and issues affecting Indigenous communities. They focus on advocacy and legal support for membership-based organisations

Wisnu Tirta is from KT. After visiting the farmer community to conduct needs assessment, he identified a general lack of awareness on good farming practices. "After meeting with them, we found a solution on how to improve their farming practices," says Wisnu. "We brought in an agricultural practitioner from Manokwari, and they studied together. Eventually, they were able to achieve better yields," he added.

Not only did the community improve their crop yields, they also shared their new knowledge with farmers from other villages. This knowledge sharing helped meet daily food requirements, while also developing crops into a more valuable commodity, which they can sell in Sausapor (approximately 30-40 minutes away), or at bigger markets in Sorong city (approximately 4-5 hours away).



Sephi, the manager of Yaf Kayam Farmers Market, is responsible for purchasing products from the farmers. (KAOEM TELAPAK/Wisnu)



## GROWING THE COOPERATIVE

Since its formation on 2 September 2022, the farmers' cooperative has been able to purchase the raw materials they need, and then cover their costs by selling produce at the market. However, they have not yet been able to turn a profit. "So we buy vegetables for Rp. 5,000 and sell them for Rp. 10,000. Chilies are priced at Rp. 20,000 per kilo, which we divide into smaller portions of Rp. 10,000 each. The price difference is not too high," explains Sephi, who is a member of the group.

Initially, the group sold their items in a modest stall or kiosk made of aluminium plate and wood. The cooperative has since renovated this kiosk and turned it into a permanent building. With support from the PERMATA Project, the restoration process was successfully completed on 21 June 2023 and named 'Yaf Kayam Market'. The new site was officially opened by local government officials, along with members of the cooperative, the Samdhana Institute and other partners from the PERMATA consortium.

"Now things have improved, and we feel safer conducting transactions," says Sephi, who manages the group's sales through online platforms such as WhatsApp and Yaf Kayam's Facebook page, which is set up specifically to serve the Bikar District area. Utilising these new technologies, the group has even begun to expand its product range into fish and seafood products such as skipjack tuna and rockfish.

Entering new markets has allowed the cooperative to incorporate neighbouring villages into their operations, adding valuable new ideas and knowledge to the group. "The existence of this market enables them to control their own economy," says Ambrosius Ruwindrijarto, Living Lifespace Programme Head at Samdhana. "They have their own market and can influence the circulation of money and how it contributes to the local economy."



June 21, 2023 The cooperative has renovated this kiosk and turned it into a permanent building and named it

### Yaf Kayam Market



One of the farmers sells their agricultural products at the Yaf Kayam Farmers' Market. (KAOEM TELAPAK/Wisnu)



## NEXT STEPS

Looking ahead, the cooperative intends to purchase a freezer (currently, they only have a refrigerator to produce ice cubes, which are used to preserve fish stored in cooler boxes). There are also plans to develop products using natural resources in Wertam, including products derived from coconut such as virgin coconut oil (VCO) and massage oil, as well as making banana flour, wheat flour, and processing palm tree sap into palm sugar.

"In principle, our aim is to process the resources available here ourselves," says Sephi. "This initiative not only creates job opportunities but also strives to break the cycle of dependency on external food sources," he adds. "If we can produce our own sugar, why should we purchase it from outside? Similarly, if we can grow our own onions, there is no need to buy them elsewhere. Additionally, if we can make our own salt, there is no reason to rely on external sources. We have numerous aspects we want to develop."

With this experience with Yaf Kayam farmers' market, we learned that progress is a product of fruitful collaboration between multiple parties, acting in synergy at various levels of government and society. Looking to the future, we will continue exploring new strategies with partners, strengthening our shared commitment to improving services and improving access to tenure rights for customary law communities. Through a territorial approach strategy, we hope to give Indigenous communities in Papua more momentum towards sustainable and equitable well-being of their lives and territories.

# IPR Registration for *Keik Kuok Moi* trademark

By: Naely Himami

In February 2023, Febri Wally, a member of the Moi Tribe, received official intellectual property rights (IPR) certification for the *Keik Kuok Moi* trademark. This brand presents authentic handicraft products made by the Moi tribal community, marketed through Noken Village – also referred to as *Kampung Kuok* in the Moi tribal language.

Febri Wally works as a supervisor for the Bawaslu district in Sorong City and is the Secretary of the *Sanggar Keik Kuok Moi* studio; an organisation that sells authentic Moi crafts. The studio also plays a crucial role in developing the capacity of mothers and young people, in a bid to preserve the cultural values of the Moi tribe. In addition to developing and selling craft products online (via TikTok @kuokmoi) and offline, Febri has been instrumental in managing the long-term development of the *Keik Kuok Moi* trademark by registering its IPR.

*Sanggar Keik Kuok Moi* sells products made by women from seven artisan groups in the Klasaman District of Sorong in Southwest Papua. This region is home to a number of traditional handicrafts, one of which is the *noken*; a traditional woven bag which is made with natural materials and was inscribed on the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding in 2012. *Noken* bags are ubiquitous throughout Papua, and each region's creations have their own unique characteristics. For example, in Papua Province, *noken* are generally made from the bark of *nenduum* trees, *nawa* trees or forest orchids; meanwhile, *noken* from West Papua (where the Moi tribe are based) tend to be knitted using forest pandan leaves and are wider in their appearance.

For the Moi tribe, all *noken* bags are made using traditional techniques. First, the leaves are prepared by stripping the thorns; second, the



Febri surrounded by the various authentic artisan products of the Moi tribe (SAMDHANA/Rizqiah)

leaves are then rolled up to make them easier to boil; third, the leaves are boiled so they are more malleable and can be woven into *noken* – this process also gives them their distinctive earthy brown colouration; finally, additional colours are added for decoration, including red, light purple and black. Occasionally, *noken* makers also add carvings, patterns or designs inspired by the diversity of flora and fauna in West Papua, with motifs such as ocean waves, circles and text.

In addition to their distinctive *noken* bags, the Moi tribe are renowned for various other signature crafts, including mats made from forest pandan leaves, *batik* adorned with Moi tribal motifs and many other creations inspired by local culture in West Papua. Many of these handicraft products,

such as woven cloth, food and knick-knacks typical of the Moi tribe community, are sold through *Noken Village*.

In addition to economic development, Noken Village provides the Moi tribal community with a way to preserve their traditional culture, while also imparting skills to future generations. In Sorong, residents both young and old are encouraged to use *noken* (or *kuok*) on Thursdays and Fridays, as part of government efforts to celebrate and preserve local, traditional handicrafts. In addition, since 2019 the Moi tribal community has held the Noken Village Festival, which attracts hundreds of people and showcases the various handicrafts, dances, music and language of the Moi tribe.

## WHAT IS IPR?

Based on the law of The Republic of Indonesia number 19 year 2002 regarding copyright chapter 1 article 1, IPR are exclusive rights granted to a person – or group of people – for their copyrighted work; materials eligible for IPR certification can be anything resulting from human intellectual ability. Essentially, this gives creators the exclusive right to enjoy the financial rewards of their creativity. IPR can protect the rights of Indigenous artists, while also raising welfare standards and improving economic conditions in their communities.

In Indonesia, IPR (known locally as *Hak Kekayaan Intelektual*, or 'HAKI') falls under the jurisdiction of the Directorate General of Intellectual Property (DJKI) of the Ministry of Law and Human Rights in each province. In West Papua, this is handled by the Regional Office of the Ministry of Law and Human Rights.

IPR registrants are obliged to fulfil several requirements set by the Ministry of Law and Human Rights. The general requirements include name, citizenship status and a complete address of the registrant or copyright holder. Then the applicant registers either by: applying directly to the DJKI regional offices of Indonesia, or through a registered IPR consultant legal attorney, or by registering independently online via the [dgi.go.id](http://dgi.go.id) website. IPR applicants can also see on the DJKI's website whether their product has been registered or not.



### ADDRESS

Regional Office of the Ministry of Law and Human Rights of West Papua

Jalan I. Trikora Arfai 2 Logpon, Anday, Manokwari, Manokwari Regency, West Papua.



## PROMOTING IPR IN WEST PAPUA

Samdhana has teamed up with Indonesia's Regional Research and Innovation Agency, or *Badan Riset dan Inovasi Daerah* (BRIDA), a government organisation dedicated to research, the development and application of technology, and the promotion of sustainable development at the provincial level. BRIDA West Papua helps to facilitate the registration of intellectual property or *HAKI*.

In this collaboration, 11 products have been collectively registered, including Mika Duwit's *Cenderawasih is Blowing* motif, Oktovianus Malagifi's *Pau Maladum* song, David Womsiwor's 2nd *Karwar Arbur* motif, Meriyones Fami Balitbangda's *Katawe* motif and Florida Reba's *Mystery of Life* motif.

Together with BRIDA West Papua, Samdhana has created short-, medium- and long-term goals for IPR registration in West Papua. The aim is to help craftspeople in the region gain IPR certification, and then support their welfare after IPR has been obtained. In practice, this support includes organising various focus group discussions (FGD), talk shows and online *Menoken* events to promote the products while also providing coaching clinics and technical support in IPR registration for Papuan craftsmen, artists and cultural figures, from the district and city to the province level.

Discussions were also held to develop provincial-level regulations and standard operating procedures (SOPs) for verifying Indigenous communal IPR. This resulted in a Special Regional Regulation (*Raperdasus*) on the Protection of Intellectual Property Rights of Indigenous Papuans, which helps to optimise IPR registration for protection of culture and customary heritage in West Papua.



Mama Fami is weaving mats from pandan leaves to sell in Keik Moi. (SAMDHANA/Naelly)

The West Papua Provincial Government, acting through BRIDA West Papua and supported by related stakeholders, encouraged the formation of a special office responsible for the protection and utilization of IPR.

In addition, public service innovations regarding the facilitation of IPR registration have utilised the *Jemput Bola* ('pick up the ball') system, whereby service providers contact creative communities and trademark owners directly, and the Intellectual Property Information System ([SINDI](#))<sup>3</sup>.

For more information about Samdhana's ongoing work to support IP registration for West Papuan artisans, please read [this article](#)<sup>4</sup>.



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<sup>3</sup> <https://hakibrida.papuaratprov.go.id/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://samdhana.org/stories/intellectual-property-rights-indigenous-peoples-papua>

# Degebdeb Community Brings Education Closer to Home

By: Bernadie Jamora, Kayessie Marie Suga and Sweet Edrote

*"Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today."*

– Malcolm X, civil rights activist

For many Indigenous communities in the Philippines, the issue of non-recognition of their rights, especially rights to their ancestral domain, and the difficulty to access education are two sides of the same coin. Many Indigenous communities live far away from the barangay (village) center where the public schools are located. And many local government units and agencies are not sensitive and responsive to their needs. In areas where there is strong conflict over land ownership, the tensions arising between Indigenous groups and other land claimants become an additional obstacle to Indigenous children's education.

Although the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (IPRA RA 8371) has been in place for the last 26 years, a practical understanding of its contents and knowledge of how Indigenous peoples can use the law to assert their rights has not yet permeated all Indigenous communities, especially those living in remote and geographically isolated areas.

The Degebdeb community is one of these groups. They are part of the Menuvu Kirenteken tribe, and their territory in Southern Bukidnon is recognised by the government through the Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title R10-DON-0216-206 (CADT 206). They are one of the 48 clans residing inside the unified ancestral domain, where various issues of overlapping tenurial instruments are rampant.

## Obstacles to education

Datu Bobby Lagwas is a member of the Menuvu Kirenteken Indigenous People, in the community of Degebdeb. He is also chairperson of the Indigenous Peoples organization in Barangay Pualas. As one of the leaders who fought to rightfully reclaim parts of their CADT that have already been converted to agricultural plantations, he has been threatened with arrest by local officials. Many members of their community are experiencing a backlash from barangay officials in response to their efforts to re-occupy lands within their ancestral domain. Because of this, he has not been able to go outside of his community in the last 12 months, and unable to approach government agencies for the basic services that they need.

For the children of the Degebdeb community, gaining access to education has proved especially challenging. "Unlocking opportunities for education, especially for Indigenous Peoples, has proven to be a difficult task," explained Datu Bobby, "with obstacles faced not only by the children themselves but also by their parents and the wider community."

As ethnic Menuvu, the children must overcome a combination of economic problems – like their parents' lack of income to buy their school needs, and even their daily food for school, and logistical hurdles. They have to walk approximately 10 kilometers to the nearest public school. This journey can be dangerous, especially during heavy rains, when students have to cross a raging river. On top of that, they are subjected to discrimination in school, simply because of their identity. In spite of all these trials, Datu Bobby and their community remain steadfast in their belief that 'education is the key to success'.

### **Asserting their rights and claiming their education**

Datu Bobby noticed positive changes taking place in the Degebdeb community, particularly since they started working with Samdhana in 2021. Samdhana has been partnering with communities in CADT 206 in support to strengthen their indigenous governance over the unified ancestral domain. One of the core activities that Samdhana facilitates is a community-based orientation on Indigenous Peoples rights and on the IPRA law.

In the past, there had been a general lack of understanding among community members about their rights as indigenous peoples, and how their governance should be based on their traditional processes. This led to division amongst the community and resulted in limited participation in decision-making. But after participating in a variety of training and reflection sessions, covering topics such as the inherent legal rights of Indigenous Peoples, community members gained a clearer understanding of how they can stand for their rights within their ancestral domain. This new-found agency is

paving the way for access to education.

Determined to ensure the Degebdeb children can have their own education, in June 2023, the community established a makeshift structure of bamboo and tarpaulin in their village. This served as a temporary classroom, especially for kids that were too small to make the long walk to the nearest public school. The community members then created a resolution request for the establishment of an IP school as a more long-term solution.

Datu Bobby encouraged the community to submit their resolution to the Provincial Division of the Department of Education (DepEd), located in Malaybalay City, some two hours away from their town by bus. They specifically requested that the DepEd will assign specialist IP teachers so that, in addition to following the standard national curriculum, they could teach the children the importance of understanding and protecting their cultural identity. They also requested that community elders be allowed to teach at least once a week, with lessons focusing on traditional culture and knowledge, and language. The community also sent appeals to the Don Carlos municipal government, which allocates and approves budgets for school development projects.

In September 2023, the DepEd responded to the community's request by approving the creation of an extension school for elementary-level students. According to a resolution from the Sangguniang Bayan, the municipal legislative council of Don Carlos town, four buildings for kindergarten up to grade 6 would be constructed in 2024, with further construction projects – for a high school and college – slated for 2025 and 2030, respectively.



Menuvu leaders meet in Degebdeb to collectively agree on actions brought about by issues in the community. (SAMDHANA/Bernadie)

To support this development and continue the process of unlocking education opportunities for local Indigenous learners, the Degebdeb community conducted their own fundraising efforts to provide a monthly honorarium of Php 5,000 (approximately US\$ 89) each to five teachers. The community have also built a hut where the teachers can stay.

To date, a total of 117 students have enrolled in the Degebdeb IP school, which the DepEd has recognised as an extension of the existing Pualas Elementary School. Most of them have already learned to read and write, and many more are engaging in extracurricular activities in their barangay.

For the Menuvu Kirenteken community of Degebdeb, these developments have demonstrated the power of collaborative action

and the unwavering assertion of legal rights. Looking to the future, the Degebdeb community will continue working with the DepEd to establish and expand the IP school. In the long term, these facilities will provide a learning hub for Indigenous community members; a place where they can celebrate their shared heritage and transfer traditional knowledge to the next generation.

With support from Samdhana, the community has crafted a strategic plan related to the development of their wider area, which covers education, food production and the development of Indigenous enterprise projects that can generate independent, sustainable income for the community. Working together to engender positive changes, they are now able to claim their rightful access to land, agency and an education befitting their people.

# Fellow's Retreat 2023: Reflecting on two decades of Samdhana

To celebrate the Samdhana Institute's 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, and as part of the Samdhana Partnerships Programme, a special gathering was held from 15-17 September 2023 at the Prana Dewi Mountain Resort in Bali, Indonesia. The meeting was attended by a total of 22 Samdhana Fellows, each of whom brought their unique experience of the past 20 years, and shared their hopes for the future.

Over three days, the event gave attendees the chance to take stock of the Samdhana journey thus far, reflect on some key milestones and determine the path forwards. Each day had its own theme: day 1 was *celebrate our histories*, day 2 questioned *what value do we bring to the world?* and day 3 was entitled *going forward*.

In this article, we'll focus on day one of the Retreat, when the Fellows took a look back on the past 20 years of the Samdhana Institute.



Fellows, Samdhana staff and youth partners during the retreat at Prana Dewi Retreat Centre in Bali on 14 September 2023. (SAMDHANA/Anggit)

## FULLY PRESENT, REFLECTING ON THE PAST

The day began with a collective ritual involving some movement exercises and then a meditation session that focused on being connected, grounded and fully present in the moment. Next, the group worked together to compile a timeline of Samdhana's 20-year history, discussing the many twists and turns the road had taken in that time.

The Fellows reflected on how Samdhana had been set up to advocate for Indigenous rights in the Philippines and Indonesia, motivated by a shared determination to put the needs of communities before the agenda of donors – a common trap that aid organisations can fall into during their early formative years.

This was followed by a 'building on opportunities' phase, when the Fellows became involved in small-and medium-sized programmes; and a 'growth and formalization' phase, which established the organisational structures needed to give Samdhana Institute greater autonomy, expand its partnerships and take on larger projects.

As Samdhana began to grow, develop its resources, and expand its impact, the Programmes were able to extend its reach into a more global network, while also mentoring a younger generation of Indigenous activists and environmental campaigners.

## PITFALLS AND POSSIBILITIES: THE UPS AND DOWNS OF TWO DECADES

In the afternoon, the Fellows posed a series of open-ended questions that shed light on developments and disappointments from the past 20 years. Discussions focused on communications and interactions between Fellows, Board and Programmes; the role of Fellows and their effective coordination; opportunities for engagement; managing conflicts of interest and staff relations; clarifying roles and rules in the organisation; impacting government policy; and Samdhana's changing perspectives on youth, gender and environmental issues over time.

Sharing their perspectives within a caring, inclusive and supportive environment, the Fellows highlighted concerns from their journey. Some were afraid that activities could become fragmented, or "trapped in other stakeholders' games"; others worried that Samdhana could lose sight of its original values and become something it didn't want to be; all agreed that growth should be

rooted in core values, supported by a clear chain of trust and protected by continuous risk assessment.

The afternoon's activities gave the Fellows a renewed sense of purpose, and they committed to delivering Samdhana's aims and objectives while fostering an inclusive working environment that unites staff and Fellows around shared goals. Day one ended with a lively discussion on donor-recipient power relations, and the danger of inadvertently perpetuating a neo-colonial paradigm.

As the sun set on the first day of the Samdhana Fellows Retreat, all participants began looking forward to what the next day would bring; a new dawn of Samdhana impacts, just beyond the horizon.

To learn about what happened during three days of the Samdhana Fellows Retreat, please visit the Samdhana website, through the QR below.





## THE SAMDHANA INSTITUTE

An Asian Centre for Social and Environmental Renewal

### Indonesia Office:

Jalan Tampomas No. 33, Bogor 16128 Jawa Barat,  
Phone +62 251 7546173

### Philippines Office:

#91 Tomas Saco - 1st St. Brgy. Nazareth 9000  
Cagayan de Oro City, Phone +63 88 851 9238

### Quezon City Office:

Unit 2A La Residencia Bldg., 114 Maginhawa St.,  
Teachers Village East, 1101 Quezon City

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