

Action Mediation: Unpacking Methods for Working from Scratch with Island Women on Renewable Energy

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Renewable energy is not only technology

Energy access shapes everyday life: households, communication, livelihoods and social activities.

Women may be central energy users and household managers while remaining less visible in technical decision-making.

Participation therefore needs to be understood through power, knowledge, gender and existing social relations.

The challenge is not simply how to install FPV, but how people can collectively understand, negotiate and organise around it.



The methodological problem: working from scratch



KATINTING Village

Tamparang Island
South Sulawesi

Katinting had no existing women's group focused on energy and technology.

There was no ready-made participatory space into which the project could simply invite women.

The group developed through repeated encounters, trust, relationships and meaningful activities.

The question shifted from “How do we facilitate participation?” to “How do we make participation possible?”

The conceptual pathway

1

Ethnography

learning with people and understanding everyday realities.

2

Action Learning

questioning, reflection, collective learning and action.

3

Social Infrastructure

relationships, trust, knowledge and organisation around technology.

4

Action Mediation

connecting these elements and making collective action possible.

Methods: ethnography + action learning



Long-term ethnographic engagement in Katinting.

Participant observation, informal conversations, interviews and household/community encounters.

Women's Action Learning meetings as sequential rather than one-off workshops.

Multisensory work: photography, video, reflection and hands-on experience.

The methods were interwoven rather than treated as separate stages.



Dg. Bangu: energy is seasonal and interconnected

“We really have to conserve electricity... Unfortunately, when there is plenty of electricity, there is no water at all.”

Her account connects electricity with rainfall, sunlight, batteries, seaweed and water.

Energy scarcity is experienced through everyday labour—not only through technical indicators.

Ethnographic listening made these connections visible before they became workshop topics.



Building the Women's Action Learning Group

Early meetings were uneven: some women attended once and did not return. Some women were hesitant to speak or deferred to people they considered more educated.

Repeated Saturday meetings gradually created familiarity and continuity.

Around 18–20 women became active participants.

The space developed through practice rather than being imposed from outside.



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Dg. Kobe: learning travelled into the household

“I was very happy to see his progress, and it made me even more confident in sharing information from the group meetings because he accepted it so well.”

She connected the group’s discussion of gender and domestic work with her relationship with her husband.

Her account shows that learning did not remain inside the meeting.

It shows a concrete change in everyday negotiation.

I treat this as evidence of changing possibilities for agency—not as proof of broad empowerment.



Dg. Ngalung: what does electricity mean in everyday life?

“If there’s an electricity business, the house becomes bright, every night we can charge phones, and it’s useful for weddings or circumcision events.”

Electricity was described through brightness, phone charging and community events.

Her perspective moves the discussion away from electricity as an abstract technical commodity.

Energy has social and economic value because it supports things people already care about.

Participation therefore needs to begin from everyday experience.



Dg. Ngangi: from fear to familiarity

“Adapting new things (renewable energy) is not only about the technology itself, but it also depends on us, on our relationships, and on how we work together.”

She described renewable energy as something she had initially been afraid of.

“Learning together” made the technology feel closer and easier to understand.

She connected technology to relationships and collective work.

Her account links hardware with knowledge, confidence and organisation.



Dg. Sunnarik and *merasakan*

“What once felt unfamiliar is now something we can approach with confidence.”

She described learning about electricity, climate change, renewable energy and women’s roles.

She connected learning with video, reflection, hands-on experience and *merasakan*.

Merasakan involves feeling and experiencing, not only understanding intellectually.

Multisensory methods therefore became part of the learning process.



From participation to social infrastructure

A solar panel can be installed relatively quickly.

Relationships, trust, knowledge, routines and responsibilities develop much more slowly.

The Saturday meetings became part of this slower process

Social infrastructure is not an “extra” around technology; it helps make technology meaningful and governable.



What action mediation adds

Action learning explains questioning, reflection, learning and action.

Social infrastructure highlights the relational and organisational conditions around technology.

Ethnography explains how relationships and situated knowledge develop through sustained engagement.



Action mediation connects these processes: it is the work of making collective action possible.

Discussion

Three methodological lessons

1. Participation is not always an entry condition—it may need to be built.
2. Women's existing knowledge should meet technical knowledge rather than be treated as a deficit.
3. Participation should not automatically be called empowerment; changes need to be understood through women's experiences and wider power relations.



Conclusion: making collective action possible

Action mediation is less about giving women knowledge than creating conditions for different forms of knowledge to meet.

It develops through relationships, trust, repeated encounters, collective learning and reflection.

Renewable energy becomes a social, technical and organisational process—not simply a technology to be installed.

Working from scratch makes the hidden labour of participation visible.



Thank you!

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