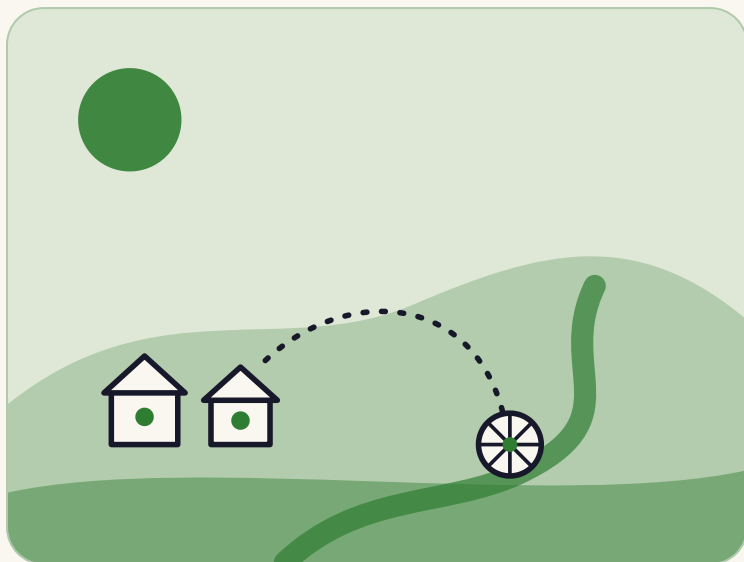




INDONESIA

The villages that sell their own power

A group in Indonesia helped villages build river power plants. Then it helped change a law.

WHERE Subang to Sumba

WHO Tri Mumpuni and IBEKA, with the villages that own the plants

WHEN 1992 to 2012

4 min read

The story

In much of Indonesia, night means darkness. In 2012, more than one in three people had no power from the grid. Many lived in remote villages, far from any power line.

Tri Mumpuni leads a group called IBEKA. Her husband, an engineer named Iskandar Kuntoadji, started it in 1992. The group builds small power plants on streams. Water turns a turbine, and the turbine makes electricity.

A plant the village owns

Many earlier projects had failed. A German aid agency found over 1,000 small hydro plants that people had abandoned. No one kept them running.

IBEKA works differently. It talks with the village first. Villagers help build the plant and learn to run it. A village cooperative owns it. IBEKA stays for about 18 months to help.

Mumpuni says every plant needs a community group to look after it.

Selling power to the state

Then came a bigger idea. A village plant could also feed the national grid. The villagers could sell power to the state power company, called PLN. But PLN did not have to buy it.

IBEKA pushed for ten years. That push helped change the law. Now PLN must buy power from small hydro plants.

In 2005, the village of Cinta Mekar opened a plant that cost about \$180,000. It makes 120 kilowatts. A village enterprise sells the power to PLN. The money stays in the village.

The first thing I would buy is a fridge, for ice and a tv for my kids.

DAUD KAPADING MALAHINA, GRANDFATHER, SUMBA ISLAND, TO
ASIA CALLING, 2011

1,000+

abandoned plants
found by a German
aid agency

10 years

of pushing to change
one law

54,000

people helped, by
2012

Light on Sumba

In 2011, a plant was being built at Umburundi on Sumba island. The road there is rough. It is over four hours from the nearest town.

Daud Kapading Malahina had only a homemade oil lamp. He said his children could not read by it. With power, children could study, and women could weave at night.

Not every plant lasts

In one village, a company bought the land upstream. It built a golf course. Less water reached the turbine, and it stopped. Mumpuni admits that some of her plants no longer work.

Still, by 2012 IBEKA had built 57 off-grid plants and four grid-connected ones. Ashden, a British charity, gave the group an award that year.

How it unfolded

- **1992** IBEKA is founded in Indonesia.
- **2005** Cinta Mekar opens a plant that sells power to PLN.
- **2011** A plant is being built on Sumba.
- **2012** IBEKA wins an Ashden Award.

CHAPTER TWO

What makes it special

Many clean-energy projects are built and then left alone. This story is about who owns the plant after the ribbon is cut. Here, villagers did not just get light. They got a small business and a say in how it runs.

It also shows slow work. IBEKA pushed for ten years to change one rule. And it is honest: some plants failed.

OUR TAKE

The turbine matters less than the village group that keeps it running. Ownership is what keeps the lights on.

What we can learn

1 Plan for month six, not just day one

IBEKA stayed about 18 months and trained villagers to run each plant.

Try this: For one project, write down who will look after it in six months.

2 Give people real ownership

Each plant belongs to a village cooperative, not to a distant agency.

Try this: Ask the people you serve to make one decision for you this week.

3 Fix the rule, not just the problem

IBEKA lobbied for ten years until PLN had to buy village power.

Try this: Name one rule that blocks your goal, and who can change it.

4 Say what failed

Mumpuni openly told IPS that some plants had stopped working.

Try this: Share one thing that did not work, and what you learned.

Build it so they can keep it.

Sources

Ashden Awards

[IBEKA: Community-owned micro hydro](#)

Inter Press Service

[Micro Hydels Power Indonesia's Green Energy Plans](#)

Asia Calling

[Micro-hydro Bringing Electricity to Millions of Remote Indonesians](#)

Fact-check note: Sources disagree on scale. Ashden and IPS (both 2012) say 61 plants and about 54,000 people. Asia Calling (2011) says about 50 turbines and half a million people, so that figure is not used. Ashden and IPS agree on the 54,000. The share of people without grid power is given as over a third (Ashden), 35 percent (IPS) and almost 40 percent (Asia Calling). Ashden names Iskandar Kuntoadji as the founder of IBEKA in 1992 and Mumpuni as executive director; some other profiles give 1993 or call her a co-founder, so the story names both. A monthly income for Cinta Mekar (about 600 euros, from Asia Calling) is not used, because Ashden gives a price per kilowatt-hour instead. The Umburundi plant was still being built in the 2011 report. All numbers come from 2011 and 2012, and the current state of the plants was not checked. Ashoka's pages on Mumpuni could not be opened. Lines marked "Our take" are interpretation. Everything else comes from the sources above.