



How a press freedom index in Indonesia **creates change**

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In a joint effort with the National Press Council, PPMN (Indonesian Association for Media Development) produced their first national press freedom index in 2016. When they first started, they didn't expect it would be an education and emancipation tool for press freedom within a year.

International to local index

Eni Mulia, director of PPMN explains the need for a national press freedom index. A project supported by Free Press Unlimited. “The international indexes give us insight into our position in the world. But I don't feel it's a correct reflection of the reality,” says Eni. She elaborates: “Take Afghanistan and East Timor. In 2017 they had a higher press freedom ranking than Indonesia. However, we know Afghanistan is an area of conflict and East Timor is learning from Indonesia on how to make regulations for press freedom.”

Each international press freedom index has its own indicators and methodology. This allows them to compare their data on a global scale. However criteria aren't always applicable or give the right context for each country states Eni. “On top of that, in case of Indonesia, the international indexes aren't very thorough.” She explains: “They only give a total score on country level, but say nothing about the individual provinces. We do the survey in each province, that way we can report both on national and local level.”

Improving press freedom

Doing so the index also functions as a sort of map for journalists in Indonesia. It indicates the strengths and challenges of an area. For example, journalists who have to work in or report from a certain area are informed on safety and security issues. The aim is to achieve an enabling environment for the media so they can work freely and professionally.

“In my opinion what really matters is what we do with the index. It helps us monitor and improve the press freedom, so the index is like a mirror to us,” says Eni. She explains that from the press freedom index they take the time to analyse the results and act upon it. “We socialise the score of every province and whenever there is opportunity we meet with local government to discuss the results of the press freedom index. When local governments are appreciative, we encourage them

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to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the local governor and the national Press Council for a further commitment to increase the press freedom index in respective province”.

PPMN strives for actual change. So once the MoU is in place, they meet with representatives of the local government -such as an Ministry of Information and Communication- and set up focus group discussion or workshop. In these meetings they challenge the agencies to draft a plan of action for improving press freedom. During these discussions they learned that very few participants know what press freedom is or why it is important. For example the questions raised are: “Is it ok to give journalists presents, souvenirs or transportation money.” Or: “Sometimes journalists don’t want to interview me, they just want to threaten and blackmail me with a corruption case. How do I deal with that?”

Explaining the basics of journalism

Eni: “The sad thing is that they sometimes don’t understand that this is wrong. They think that this is the way journalists earn their living.” Confronted with this lack of knowledge and awareness, Eni and her team decided to give workshops to government staff explaining the basics of press freedom and journalism. So what started out as a geographically detailed press freedom index, surprisingly also became an education and emancipation tool.

Encouraged by the current success, PPMN is searching of ways to make the report and the changes sustainable. Whilst Free Press Unlimited continues to support the project, the biggest struggle remains having enough capacity. For research as well as creating real change which enables the media to work in a professional and safe environment. Eni: “The Press Freedom index research is using the state budget, but this is not sufficient to do more socialisation and promoting it in order to make real changes in the improvement of the press freedom in our country.”

Development plans for press freedom

Free Press Unlimited has not only supported the project financially but also made a contribution to the sustainability of PPMN. The role of PPMN as a non-profit media development organisation and partner of the Press Council is stronger and has created new synergies with (local) governments and opportunities in professional work promoting press freedom.

“We are certain that the collaboration between the two organisations will be useful, not only for improving press freedom in Indonesia, but also as a part of the effort to improve press freedom across Asia.” Yosep Adi Prasetyo, Chair of the Press Council in Indonesia.

The press freedom index is included in investment/development plans for each province.

[Have a look at the Press Freedom Index \(in Indonesian\)](#)

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