



**UNCNCG**

*Center for  
Women's Health  
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**CAROLINA**  
GLOBAL  
**BREASTFEEDING**  
INSTITUTE

# **13<sup>th</sup> Breastfeeding and Feminism International Conference**

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## **The Role of the Church in Supporting Breastfeeding: A Case Study in Indonesia**

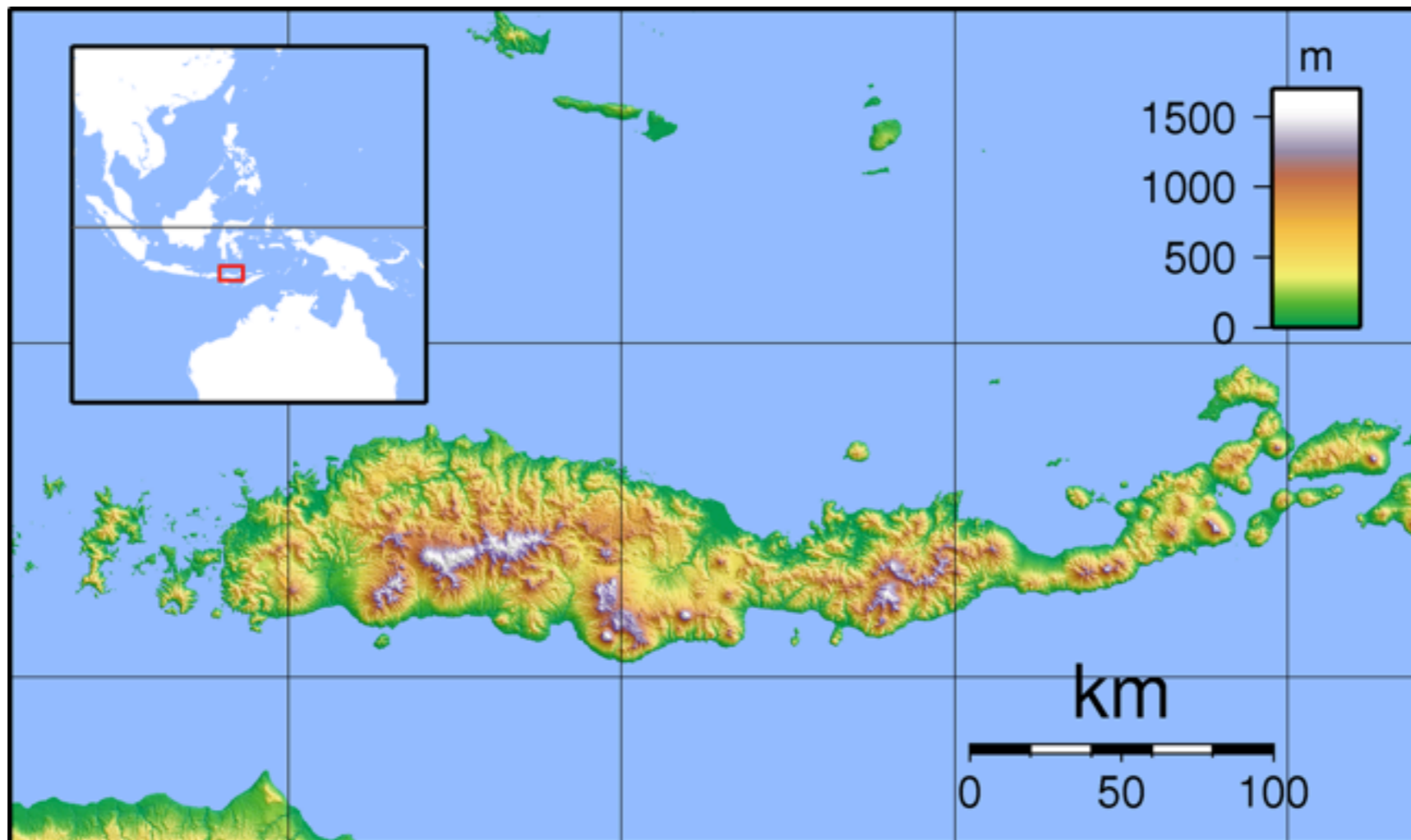
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# Introduction

- Indonesia bears the burden of having the world's fifth-highest percentage of stunted children. Over 37 percent of Indonesian children aged less than five years are stunted, and almost three million children or 12 per cent were wasted.
- Optimal breastfeeding is associated with a child's healthy growth and development and is a key factor in reducing stunting. Unfortunately, although about 96 percents of Indonesian children aged under two are breastfed, only 42 percents are exclusively breastfed for the first six months.
- Addressing Indonesia's breastfeeding challenge is beyond the capacity of any single entity or organization. A partnership between government, a civil society, and a UN agency or donor or faith-based organization can play a prominent role in promoting the most appropriate feeding practices for infants and young children. Despite Indonesia has the largest Muslim population in the world. Working with churches or religious leaders in certain area not only expands the capacity for action, it also has the capacity to reach and rapidly transform the lives of many mothers and children.

Sikka is located in one of the poorest provinces in Indonesia, with about 30 percent of the population living below the poverty line.



To present a best practice for the church in its role of supporting breastfeeding in Sikka, a coastal district in the eastern part of Indonesia that has stunting prevalence figures among the highest in the country.

# BEST PRACTICES IN IMPROVING INFANT AND YOUNG CHILD NUTRITION

- Churches and religious institutions are committed to improving public awareness of the best nutrition for young children, in order to improve the health of the community
- Religious leaders have incorporated advice on the feeding of infants and young children into church sermons and services
- Religious leaders and churches have integrated what the Bible says about breastfeeding with evidence of its health benefits, for both mothers and children
- The churches published and printed a booklet on the significance of the first 1,000 days of life
- One church functions as a centre for community nutrition advocacy
- Partnership with the local health office and NGOs

# RESULTS

- **Improvement in exclusive breastfeeding:**
- In the poor area, including Sikka Exclusive Breastfeeding rate increased almost 30 percentage points and by 2014 more than 80 per cent of these infants were exclusively breastfed.
- Nationally, exclusively breastfeeding rate increased by 20 percentage points (52.2 to 72.3 per cent) among all children between 2011 and 2014.
  
- **Stunting reduction:**
- Between 2011 and 2014, the prevalence of stunting in children aged less than three years dropped by more than five percentage points (29.6 to 23.9 per cent) among all children and by 10 percentage points among the poorest children.
- National survey indicate that the prevalence of stunting in children aged less than five years remained virtually unchanged between 2007 (36.8 per cent) and 2013 (37.2 per cent).

# CONCLUSIONS

- Churches, religious leaders and institutions are ideal partners because they have considerable influence and have much greater capacity than the health sector to reach men with these messages;
- Effective partnerships with religious institutions have enabled community counselling services on maternal nutrition and IYCF to reach and transform the lives of many more children and women;
- Religious leaders' political commitment is key in supporting optimal breastfeeding practices in the community;
- Importantly, religious leaders have the potential to reach and influence husbands, parents, parents-in-law, peers and other community leaders, and to deliver messages on the importance of optimal breastfeeding practices.



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