
Lasinem

*Education Division Coordinator, Women's School
Gresik, East Java*

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Lasinem

Education Division Coordinator, Women's School

Gresik, East Java¹

Thirty-one-year-old Lasinem is a leader of the Women's School in a village in Gresik district. She is the second of three children and her parents' only daughter. Lasinem comes from a poor family and her father worked as a gardener at a kindergarten. Her family's economic situation meant that Lasinem was not able to continue schooling to high school. Instead, her older brother hoped that Lasinem would be able to go to sewing school as that was valuable skill in the village.

"If it's not sewing, there's no point going to school. So, I didn't go to high school." (Lasinem, Gresik research village 20 February 2019)

Lasinem is now married to a man from the same village. Together they have twin daughters and a son. After getting married, Lasinem managed the household and did not join any village-level organisations. Lasinem thought that marriage established a barrier between domestic and outside spheres; domestic tasks were in a woman's sphere while tasks outside the house were for men.

"You could say that I was a 'true housewife' because before I really did think that if a woman already had their own household to run then she didn't have anything to do with matters outside that household. That a woman's life was only within the household. Like, you know the saying 'on the mattress, at the well, in the kitchen', like that. And if we want to do something outside the home, like charity, we do it through our husbands. Our devotion is to our husbands." (Lasinem, Gresik research village 20 February 2019)

In 2013, a staff member of the Women's Groups and Sources of Life organisation (KPS2K) visited Lasinem's home and asked her to attend the first meeting of the Women's School at the Village Hall. Lasinem initially thought that she would receive financial assistance at this event because she had never been invited to an event at the Village Hall.

"That's why the first time I participated in the Women's School, I thought I was going to get financial assistance. Usually I go to the Village Hall and get it. I thought that would happen then too, I thought that I would go home with basic food supplies or money, and I was excited." (Lasinem, Gresik research village, 20 February 2019)

This first meeting of the Women's School was attended by dozens of poor women like Lasinem. After the meeting, Lasinem kept thinking about the materials she had been given about women's issues and the difference between what had been discussed and her lived experiences.

"I was curious about Women's School activities. Why are there meetings? I was curious, so I went along. Maybe later there will be benefits for me ... I am so grateful that it happened. God gave me an opportunity, even though the Women's School is not a formal school, I am grateful that I can participate in this Women's School." (Lasinem, Gresik research village, 20 February 2019)

¹ **Authors:** Galih Prabaningrum and Norin Mustika Rahadiri Abheseka. **Editors:** Bronwyn A. Beech Jones and Annisa Sabrina Hartoto. **Disclaimer:** The views expressed in the analysis are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of the supporting governments or organisations. All names have been anonymised.

In 2014, one of Lasinem's friends who had become more active in the Women's School invited her to attend a rally for diversity in Surabaya. Drawn by her curiosity, for the first time she took part in a march with other women to celebrate Indonesian ethnic and religious diversity. Lasinem felt uncomfortable and embarrassed during the march because she associated 'a rally' with a protest, which in her view always ended in chaos. At the time, Lasinem thought that the Women's School taught members to demonstrate.

Later in 2014, the Women's School held an initial training course on Women's Leadership and Social Protection in a hotel in Prigen, East Java, for four days. Lasinem decided to not take part because social norms regard hotels as the location of unsuitable and unsavoury activities.

"I didn't go to the first women's leadership training, because I was still confused. Why was I invited to a hotel? I thought it was weird. What are they doing at a hotel? What are they training at a hotel? My husband said, because I asked his permission, 'don't go, you'll see later what your friends do.' Alright [I thought], I'll see what happens first. So, I didn't attend the first training course." (Lasinem, Gresik research village, 22 February 2019)

After the training, the Women's School communicated the results of the sessions to village officials and the community. Lasinem went to this meeting and saw that her friends who had attended the event appeared happy. Lasinem asked what the activities had been like at Prigen and her friends' responses were almost the same. They said that the training had been like learning at school. Lasinem felt intrigued by her friends' experiences and this made her more determined to participate in future Women's School activities.

In 2015, Lasinem participated in the second training session on Women's Leadership and Social Protection in Surabaya which concentrated on the concepts of sex and gender. Lasinem felt conflicted about what she learned. Since she was a child, her parents and social environment had taught her that she had to obey and not speak back to her husband, but the materials presented at this training session were different. Gradually, Lasinem realised how much women work and how domestic labour should be shared between men and women.

"It turns out that all this time I was not told what my rights actually were. I didn't know. And then I started to ask questions. Why doesn't my husband sweep? Why do I always cook? Why doesn't my husband sweep? Or cook? Sweeping doesn't have a sex. For instance, if my husband holds a broom, can the broom get pregnant? Does it have a vagina? I was thinking like that, even though if you really think about it, women do more work than men and the work takes a lot of energy and time." (Lasinem, Gresik research village, 20 February 2019)

As Lasinem is skilled in negotiating, her husband who before did not do any housework now wants to help around the house. Lasinem also has experienced change in educating her children. Before getting involved in the Women's School, she concentrated on ensuring that her children achieved good grades and that her daughters were good at cooking, putting on makeup and cleaning – which meant she had higher expectations for them than her son. Now, she prioritises talking with her children about what she and they feel.

As well as gaining knowledge, Lasinem credits the training she attended for enhancing her confidence to speak in public. Previously Lasinem had never spoke in public, however, since participating in the Women's School, Lasinem feels no longer scared, and is more confident to speak and share her opinions, even in large forums like village meetings.

The insights she gained from her Women's School training also awakened Lasinem's concern for women's issues. After participating in the training, Lasinem began to understand the problems experienced by many other women, such as unequal social rights, violence, and health issues. Before this awakening at the Women's

School, Lasinem was someone who often blamed women. For instance, Lasinem once thought that polygamy only happened because a woman was not good at serving her husband. Before joining the School, Lasinem also blamed victims of sexual assault for inviting male attention because of their clothing choices.

“It’s like what you hear, before I blamed women. Why did they wear a mini skirt, why didn’t they wear a hijab? They were asking for male lust. But it turns out, lots of older women are raped. What did they do wrong? Who was the rapist? [I know] that there are lots of problems now.” (Lasinem, Gresik research village, 20 February 2019)

Lasinem’s point of view opened and became more empathic. She now tries to share this experience with her neighbours. Usually, women who live in Lasinem’s neighbourhood gathered just to gossip, but since Lasinem joined the Women’s School, their discussions have become more serious and include women’s issues. They share issues in their house and talk about women’s rights, health problems, and experiences of violence. While there are still some people who believe that the Women’s School teaches women to speak back to their husbands, Lasinem continues to share what she has learned and experienced with her neighbours. This dedication to championing women’s rights is what led to Lasinem being selected as a Women’s School coordinator in her village and to many Women’s School members regarding her as an influential leader in the village.

As the Education Division Coordinator, Lasinem plays an important role in increasing women’s participation and influence in village forums. Despite many women participating in Musrenbangdes (Village Development Planning Consultative Meetings), the village government still prioritises infrastructure development over women’s empowerment.

Lasinem also thinks that women have not yet achieved equity in education and are still marginalised in the village. Many community members think that education is more important for boys because they will eventually become the heads of families and be expected to be the primary wage-earner. Lasinem also believes that many women in her village continue to trivialise reproductive health issues and other illnesses. She often gives advice to women who live in her area to love themselves more and prioritise their own health. Lasinem hopes that the Women’s School’s advocacy efforts to prevent child marriage will improve women’s welfare, as these marriages limit young women’s life chances and harm them. To realise these dreams, Lasinem hopes that every woman in her village can have the same opportunity she has had to gain new perspectives and information at the Women’s School.



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