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# Hj. Farah

*Head of the Village Pekka Union and Papadaan Group  
North Hulu Sungai, South Kalimantan*

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## Hj. Farah

Head of the Setia Kawan Pekka Group  
North Hulu Sungai, South Kalimantan<sup>1</sup>

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Forty-six-year-old Farah is from a migrant family who moved to the village in North Hulu Sungai in 1987. Farah works as a temporary farm labourer and earns around 1 million rupiah a month (100 AUD). In 1989, Farah got married soon after graduating from Islamic middle school (*madrasah*), however this relationship soured after her husband was unfaithful and asked for a divorce several years later. Farah and her husband decided to divorce in secret to avoid becoming a subject of neighbourhood gossip. Yet, despite having already separated, her ex-husband continued to regularly visit Farah's house to rest and ask for money.

Farah's life has been challenging as her separation meant that Farah had to shoulder the family's economic burden by herself and raise her three children, as well as her ex-husband who frequently asked her for money. Farah is resilient and works as hard as she can to support and educate her three children. She is most proud that one of her children has graduated from university and works as a Section Head in the subdistrict government.

*"It makes me proud of myself that I can fund my children to complete higher education. Now my first child has graduated from his undergraduate degree and works as government case worker. The most important thing that I continue to do is be steadfast and patient."* (Hj. Farah, North Hulu Sungai research village, 13 July 2019)<sup>2</sup>

Farah joined the Pekka union in 2011 after being invited by her friend Aminah.<sup>3</sup> Before this, she was active in community life as part of her role as the Head of the Family Hope Program (Program Keluarga Harapan – PKH) and as party of the Pekka savings and loans group. Farah explained that before she was asked to join Pekka, she and many of her friends felt unsure and increasingly anxious when discussions were held in Indonesian.

*"People were incredibly scared to be asked to talk. When we gathered to talk, they would stress and forget what they wanted to say. We confided in friends. As we have been in Pekka, now we are confident to speak Indonesian."* (Hj. Farah, North Hulu Sungai Research Village, 13 July 2019)

After being in Pekka for a year, Farah played a large part in the establishment of the Pekka "Faithful Friend" (Setia Kawan), a group designed for married women – those who before this group's establishment could not join the union. Farah recruited women for this "extraordinary membership" category for five months.

*"At first I was member, then I became a leader. It was under about a year after the Farming Group was founded, all of the members also were in the kasidah music group. I was already good at speaking in the group, so they said you can make the new group... For five months, I found members who had husbands, but whose husbands were incapacitated and couldn't work. I recruited 30 members by going from house to house."* (Hj. Farah, North Hulu Sungai research village, 13 July 2019)

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<sup>1</sup> **Authors:** Devy Dhian Cahyati and Anastasia Imelda Cahyaningrum. **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.

<sup>2</sup> Hj. stands for "Hajjah" and is the title for a woman who has performed the *hajj* to Mekka.

<sup>3</sup> Refer to Aminah's life story in this volume.

PEKKA's activities have had a significant impact on Farah's life, particularly the savings and loans group. Farah's membership of this group has enabled her to develop her own business, such as her farm, and produce her own income.

*"If we are active in the group, we save some money every month. If we don't have enough money to harvest the rice, we can borrow it. I say if there is something [you need] that is really important, you can borrow. If you don't need to borrow, you help your friends."* (Hj. Farah, North Hulu Sungai research village, 13 July 2019)

The Pekka group has also provided Farah with a space to express her worries and problems. Before her divorce, her husband was often violent toward Farah and unfaithful several times.

*"Yes, he was violent toward me, but I didn't say anything. It would sometimes happen. If it happened, I was silent and hid it and later he would try to find me and cry. Of course, I went back to him when he cried. He looked for me, so why wouldn't I go back to him? We had three children, so why wouldn't I go back to him? I always thought of the children. Sometimes my children didn't want to be apart from him. He was really lazy but my mother-in-law was incredible towards me. They have both died now. His brothers and sisters still love me and treat me like their sister. I used to believe he would change."* (Hj. Farah, North Hulu Sungai research village, 13 July 2019)

Farah gained strength and support from her fellow Pekka members. This friendship network helped her be resilient. Farah also gained a lot of new knowledge about gender equality, women's rights, and social protection at the Pekka cadre school in 2017. After participating in this course, she was determined to share the knowledge she gained so that village women would not be hesitant to express their opinions and participate in village meetings. With the writing skills and self-belief that she developed through group practices, Farah composed a piece of writing entitled "Women and Injustice" about her divorce as the final assignment for the 2017/18 cadre course.

Alongside her work with Pekka, Farah is active in many community organisations, such as the PKH, Posyandu and the Population and Family Planning Board. In the PKH, Farah is head at the village level and works together with the sub-district leader, whereas in the Population and Family Planning Board, she is a leader responsible for the village. Farah is involved in this wide range of activities because she wants to be active outside the household and increase her income. Farah also is a singer in a *mahidin* traditional Banjar music group and has performed at a national PEKKA foundation event in Jakarta.

The group Farah formed and leads now has thirty-two members. She continues to invite village women to join the Pekka union and particularly to get involved in its savings and loans group.

*"I said that it would be good if those who were active in the group saved every month, so that if we were short on money or wanted to establish a rice field we could borrow [from the group]. And if we have a really important need [for money] we can borrow. If we don't borrow, we can help friends to get benefits. She [a potential new member] was immediately interested."* (Farah, North Hulu Sungai research village, 13 July 2019)

Farah often goes around the village, both to invite women and attend women's empowerment activities, and just to discuss problems other women are facing with them. Because of this role, Farah is regarded as an inspiration to village women and the community at large.

The training Farah participated in with PEKKA has enabled her to become active in her village and actively participate in village meetings. With her new understanding of the importance of legal identity documents, Farah has also become confident to advocate for women's interests, including access to divorce documents,

Family cards and marriage certificates. She often travels to district government offices to process these documents for villagers. Farah reflects that she believes in herself more after three years of advocating for access to these documents and group discussions.

*“Thanks be to God, we often talk together here ... now, little by little we are able to speak. We didn’t believe in ourselves like a fool. Now we are confident to speak, to confide in our friends, to gain insights. We are invited to the subdistrict, thanks be to God we were invited to the subdistrict Musrenbang.”*  
(Farah, North Hulu Sungai research village, 13 July 2019)

Although Farah is related to the Village Head who was elected in 2014, she only gained access to the village meeting and other village activities because of the skills she gained from Pekka training. Farah hopes that other village women can be active in community life, like herself and her friend Aminah. She also hopes that the knowledge she has gained through Pekka can be passed on to other village women.

*“At the start I was quiet. I learned a lot about the legal status of women and children and how to process divorce documents. The starting point of my confidence was in my own experiences. Then I started to get involved in Pekka activities, like meetings and training sessions. I gained very meaningful knowledge from Pekka. I am motivated because I want to gain more knowledge and shape women as leaders. I also want to help the community to get Identity Cards, Family Cards and birth certificates.”* (Farah, North Hulu Sungai, 13 July 2019)

Despite ongoing economic challenges for her village, Farah continues to work so the village is well-known for its *mahidin* music and its active Pekka union. She hopes to one day represent the village in a district *mahidin* competition. She will also continue to attend and participate in village meetings to oversee village policymaking.



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