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WOMEN'S JOURNEYS IN DRIVING CHANGE:

Women's Collective Action and Village Law
Implementation in Indonesia

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Glossary of Acronyms and Terms

'Aisyiyah	'Aisyiyah is an autonomous mass women's organisation originally established in 1917, it is affiliated with Muhammadiyah and has a membership base of between 10 and 15 million women, MAMPU Partner	Dinas KBPPPA	<i>Dinas Keluarga Berencana, Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Perlindungan Anak</i> District Family Planning, Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Office
BaKTI	<i>Bursa Pengetahuan Kawasan Timur Indonesia</i> Eastern Indonesia Knowledge Exchange Foundation, MAMPU Partner	Dinkes	<i>Dinas Kesehatan</i> Health Office
BITRA	<i>Bina Keterampilan Pedesaan Indonesia</i> Indonesian Foundation for Rural Capacity Building, MAMPU Partner	Diskoperindag	<i>Dinas Koperasi, Perindustrian, dan Perdagangan</i> Office of Corporations, Industry and Trade
BKKBD	<i>Badan Kependudukan dan Keluarga Berencana Daerah</i> District Population and Family Planning Board	Disperindag	<i>Dinas Perindustrian dan Perdagangan</i> Office of Industry and Trade
BPD	<i>Badan Permusyawaratan Desa</i> Village Consultative Council, formally known as <i>Badan Perwakilan Desa</i> —Village Representative Council	Dusun	Hamlet, villages are comprised of multiple <i>dusun</i> .
BPJS	<i>Badan Penyelenggara Jaminan Sosial</i> National health care schemes	FAKTA	Forum for sharing health information established by the Catholic Church in Lampung, South Sumatra in the 1980s, later partnered with DAMAR, one of the founding members of the Sumatran consortium of women's organisations called PERMAMPU
BSA	<i>Balai Sakinah 'Aisyiyah</i> Women's Groups supported by 'Aisyiyah	FPL	<i>Forum Pengada Layanan</i> Forum for Service Providers, MAMPU Partner
BUMDes	<i>Badan Usaha Milik Desa</i> Village-Owned Enterprise managed by village governments	KAPAL Perempuan	<i>Lingkaran Pendidikan Alternatif Perempuan</i> The Institute for Women's Alternative Education, MAMPU Partner, established in 2000
CSO(s)	Civil Society Organisation(s)	KK	<i>Kelompok Konstituen</i> Constituent groups formed by BaKTI
DAMAR	Women's Advocacy Institute, a member of PERMAMPU, MAMPU Partner	(Program) KLIK	<i>Klinik Layanan Informasi dan Konsultasi</i> Village Consultation and Information Service Clinics
Dana Desa	Village Fund	KPS2K	<i>Kelompok Perempuan dan Sumber-Sumber Kehidupan</i> Women's Groups and Sources of Life Organisation, sub-national partner of KAPAL Perempuan
DESBUMI	<i>Desa Peduli Buruh Migran</i> Villages that Care for Migrant Workers Migrant CARE initiative providing integrated services for migrant workers and their families and information on how to safely undertake migration for work.	Kuwu	Local term for Village Head in Cirebon
		KWT	<i>Kelompok Wanita Tani</i> Women Farmers Group
		LBK	<i>Layanan Berbasis Komunitas</i> Community Based Service

Migrant CARE	MAMPU national partner, developed an initiative at the village level called the DESBUMI	PKH	<i>Program Keluarga Harapan</i> Family Hope Program
MusDes	<i>Musyawarah Desa</i> Village decision-making forum in which decisions are made based on deliberation and consensus	PKK	<i>Pemberdayaan dan Kesejahteraan Keluarga</i> Family Welfare and Empowerment Organisation
MusDus	<i>Musyawarah Dusun</i> Hamlet-level consensus and deliberation decision-making meetings	Posyandu	<i>Pos Pelayanan Terpadu</i> Integrated Health Post, a monthly maternal and child health clinic at the grassroots level
Muslimat	Nahdlatul Ulama mass Islamic women's organisation	PPK	<i>Perkumpulan Panca Karsa</i> The Panca Karsa Association—a subnational partner of Migrant CARE
Musrenbang	<i>Musyawarah Rencana Pembangunan</i> Development Planning Consultative Meeting	Puskesmas	<i>Pusat Kesehatan Masyarakat</i> Community Health Centre
Musrenbangda	<i>Musyawarah Rencana Pembangunan Daerah</i> District Development Planning Consultative Meeting	RKPDesa	<i>Rencana Kerja Pemerintah Desa</i> , Village Government Work Plan
Musrenbangdes	<i>Musyawarah Rencana Pembangunan Desa</i> Village Development Planning Consultative Meeting	RW	<i>Rukun Warga</i> Division under <i>dusun</i> or <i>kelurahan</i>
PNPM Mandiri	<i>Program Nasional Pemberdayaan Masyarakat - Mandiri</i> National Community Empowerment Program Implemented from 2007–2014, this program scaled up community driven methodologies used in the KDP to reach 65,000 villages	Sekolah Perempuan	Women's School groups established by KAPAL perempuan and their partners
NTB	<i>Nusa Tenggara Barat</i> West Nusa Tenggara Province	SPI Labuhan Batu	Independent Women's Union in Labuhan Batu, North Sumatra—a subnational partner of FPL
NTT	<i>Nusa Tenggara Timur</i> East Nusa Tenggara Province	SPPR	<i>Sekolah Peningkatan Kapasitas Perempuan Pekerja Rumahan</i> BITRA training and awareness program in the Deli Serdang research village.
NU	<i>Nahdlatul Ulama</i> Mass traditionalist Islamic organisation which runs education, health, and religious services	SPPR	<i>Serikat Perempuan Pekerja Rumahan</i> Women Homeworkers Union in Bantul, Yogyakarta
Pangkep	Pangkajene and Islands District, South Sulawesi	TTU	<i>Timor Tengah Utara</i> North Central Timor
PEKKA	<i>Yayasan Pemberdayaan Perempuan Kepala Keluarga</i> Female-Headed Families Empowerment Foundation, MAMPU Partner	YABIKU	<i>Yayasan Amnaut Bife Kuan</i> Village Women's Care Foundation, a subnational partner of FPL
Pekka	Community-based union/group of female family heads focused on empowerment	Yasanti	<i>Yayasan Annisa Swasti</i> Annisa Swasti Foundation, MAMPU Partner
Pekon	Local term for village in Lampung	YKPM	<i>Yayasan Kajian dan Pemberdayaan Masyarakat</i> Community Empowerment and Assessment Foundation

Women Driving Change in Indonesian Villages

Ken M.P. Setiawan, Bronwyn A. Beech Jones, Rachael Diprose, and Amalinda Saviraniⁱ

Indonesia's cultural and religious diversity, as well as the sheer size of the archipelago, means that the country faces complex challenges when it comes to upholding women's rights and working towards gender equality. In many rural areas especially, poverty levels are high and education levels are low. Furthermore, entrenched socio-cultural norms and beliefs often place restrictions on women's mobility and choices, confining women mainly to the domestic sphere, and out of public life and decision making. Many women, particularly those experiencing the most severe and chronic poverty across multiple dimensions of their wellbeing, often do not have the basic knowledge, paperwork or even confidence to access social services. Poverty also leads many women to seek income outside of their local communities, for example, through migrant labour that is often poorly organised, uses illicit channels and carries high risks. Access to healthcare and knowledge of, for example, reproductive health is also limited, and gender-based violence is a reality for many women.

Over the past two decades of reform, Indonesian women and the Indonesia's women's movement, including many civil society organisations (CSOs) concerned with gender equality and inclusion, have successfully advocated for new or revised legislation, policies and programs to help tackle these inequalities. Among these changes, since 2004, political parties have been obliged to ensure that 30 percent of nominated candidates are women.ⁱⁱ These gender quotas have fast-tracked women's equal representation as political candidates, particularly in the 2019 elections in which 40 percent of contenders were women.ⁱⁱⁱ Another important achievement is the passage of the 2004 Law on the Elimination of Domestic Violence,^{iv} which was the result of intensive lobbying by representatives of the Indonesian women's movement and their collaboration with government leaders. The Law has provided legal mechanisms to protect women from violence, including the criminalisation of marital rape. These legislative changes are notable achievements and have strengthened the work of many CSOs, which deliver their own programs and services to support and empower women across the country's diverse regions. However, at the same time, many challenges remain and especially in a country as diverse as Indonesia, in which improvements remain uneven, especially in poor and rural areas. Women's political presence, especially, is still constrained, particularly in rural Indonesia where women are at risk of being excluded from political processes.^v Cases of domestic violence against women remain high, with over 430,000 reported cases in 2019.^{vi}

Alongside democratisation, Indonesia also embarked on an ambitious decentralisation program that shifted political and economic power from the central to subnational levels of government. Implemented from 2001, these laws and policies have been key to increasing democratic decision making at the local level, including the participation of communities in processes to determine development priorities. The enactment of the 2014 Village Law is another important step in this process. Under this new Law, each of Indonesia's 75,000 villages receive funds from the national budget for their development priorities and initiatives through the Village Fund allocation to the village budget. The Law's emphasis on gender equity and democratic decision making offers opportunities for increased women's participation in village governance.

This edited volume is part of collaborative research conducted in 2019 by an all-female research team from The University of Melbourne and Universitas Gadjah Mada on Women's Collective Action and the Village Law

in Indonesia. In this research, we considered the extent to which, and through what mechanisms, local collective action by women influenced the implementation of the Village Law in manners responsive to the needs of women. This included the ways women sought to exercise voice and took action, as well as the role and strategies used by CSOs to support these women. Extensive analysis presented in Diprose, Savirani, Setiawan and Francis^{vii}, finds that, despite many challenges, village women across the Indonesian archipelago are making changes for themselves and their communities, thereby challenging social norms and other structural barriers to gender equality. The support provided by CSOs^{viii} to village women in these places has also helped some of Indonesia's most vulnerable women, including the female heads of families, to tackle the challenges they face, through improving access to social protection programs, the protection of migrant workers, improvement of working conditions, women's health and nutrition, and in responding to cases of violence against women while advancing prevention efforts. More than that, as is evident in women's stories presented in this volume, it has helped facilitate greater agency for these women. While some women may have already been on this path at a slower and incremental speed, for others CSO support has presented new opportunities, that to many women were unimaginable.

This volume shares the life journeys of 21 women from rural villages from Sumatra, to Java, to Kalimantan, Sulawesi and East and West Nusa Tenggara (for ethical reasons, all names have been anonymised).^{ix} In each of these villages, CSOs introduced and/or strengthened interventions to support gender inclusion, women's collective action and empowerment. The stories of these village women offer unique insights into women's aspirations, the challenges they have encountered and their achievements across multiple scales and domains, illustrating the lived complexities of women in rural Indonesia, particularly those from vulnerable groups. The stories shared highlight women's own pathways of change and their resilience and determination often in the face of resistance from their families and communities, to ultimately reduce rural gender inequities and bolster gender inclusiveness. The stories also illustrate the important role CSOs—those that are focused on gender inclusion and facilitating grassroots women's agency and empowerment—can play in supporting women's voice and agency as they undertake this journey.

These stories demonstrate how women's collective action has led to many diverse outcomes at the village level. Together women have successfully shaped village policy and contributed to village incomes. For instance, Tari (Labuhan Batu, North Sumatra), Laeli (East Lombok), and Yohana (North Central Timor), were actively involved in the drafting of village and district regulations on the rights of women and children. In Central Lombok, the survey of migrant workers conducted by Gita and other village women with Migrant CARE's regional partner the Panca Karsa Association, was invaluable in changing village-level policy on improving the protection of prospective, current, and former migrant workers. In North Hulu Sungai, South Kalimantan, Hj.^x Aminah played a key role in the establishment of the BUMDes – the Village-Owned Enterprise. In Gresik, Cirebon and Bantul, women's collective action also led to women being increasingly included in village decision-making forums.

Women's groups, with the support of CSOs, have also increased knowledge of and access to social and administrative services, expanded women's skills in voicing the needs of their communities, as well as strengthened women's economic empowerment. In Bangkalan and North Hulu Sungai, Mita and Hj. Farah were actively involved in enhancing women's access to vital documents, including birth and marriage certificates, through PEKKA's Village Consultation and Information Service Clinics.^{xi} In Lampung and Gresik, Sulis and Lastri helped women access the National Health Insurance Scheme (Badan Penyelenggara Jaminan Sosial, BPJS). Similarly, in Gresik, Cirebon and Tanggamus, Lasinem, Srikandi, and Sulis enhanced women's knowledge of and access to health information and checks, particularly for women's reproductive health. Savings and loans groups in many villages strengthened women's economic opportunities and capacities, which was also achieved by offering women skills training to develop their own small enterprises, as illustrated by the stories from Central and East Lombok. Meanwhile, in the Pangkajene islands, Laila and Julianti applied

the advocacy skills they learned through participation in the Women's School group—supported by KAPAL Perempuan—to successfully campaign for solar-powered electrification and access to clean water. Women in a diverse range of village contexts have thus increased political inclusion and actively participated in and influenced decision making. Their stories document the journeys women experienced individually and collectively, with the assistance of civil society organisations, to achieve these outcomes.

When writing these stories of women's journeys, the interviewers have sought to foreground women's own voices and expressions. This approach of prioritising women's direct speech and ways of telling their own stories stems equally from a commitment to feminist research methods and is a reflection of the relationships that were forged with women and communities during the course of this research.^{xii} These narratives recount deeply personal experiences and trajectories of change, describing women's resilience in the face of adversity and their determination to overcome these challenges.

While these stories focus on individuals, many women expressed their views and experiences in terms of 'we', rather than 'I'. In sharing their hopes for the future, women consistently referred to the needs and potential of women in the village rather than their personal goals. For example, when asked about her hopes for the future, Farah, from North Hulu Sungai in South Kalimantan answered that she was 'motivated because I wish to become more knowledgeable and shape women to become leaders'. This illustrates that while these stories narrate an individual journey, they are also intrinsically connected to a collective experience and shared aspirations. This introduction places these stories into the context of a rich history of Indonesian women's organisations. It then ties together the common threads from these life stories to weave an understanding of the processes through which women empowered themselves in groups, and what women gained through these journeys of personal and collective growth.

Antecedents to Indonesian Women's Organisations: Enabling and Constraining Change

Indonesia has a long history of women coming together to advocate for improvement in women's lives. The early 20th century saw the emergence of women's newspapers such as *Poetri Hindia*, *Poetri Mardika*, and *Soenting Melajoe*. These contained testimonies in women's words of challenges faced and efforts to develop their communities and promote education.^{xiii} This period also saw the rapid development of women's collective action through networks, mass organisations and women's groups. In 1914 the women's organisation Sapa Tresna, which later became 'Aisyiyah, was established. Affiliated with the modernist Islamic mass organisation Muhammadiyah, this organisation sought to promote the education of women and girls. The traditionalist Islamic mass organisation Nahdlatul Ulama established its women's wing Muslimat in 1946, followed four years later by Fatayat for younger women, similarly focusing on women's education and health. While in so doing these organisations addressed crucial issues for women, they did not explicitly advocate for female political participation or civil and political rights. These Islamic organisations continue to have significant influence today: they are well-established throughout the country and have been able to reach the grassroots levels of society.^{xiv}

The rise of nationalism and the immediate years following independence provided an impetus for women's political participation: women were actively involved in political life and established women's organisations. However at the same time, government rhetoric assigned women the role of 'mothers of the nation' and 'weavers of national unity', a hegemonic role that they were largely unable to contest.^{xv} Even the left-wing women's organisation Gerwani, affiliated with the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), did not question women's maternal characteristics, but fused this with political activism.^{xvi} The period of relative encouragement of women's organisation and political participation came to an abrupt and violent end following the 1965 coup, as did many other forms of organisation and political participation.

Under President Suharto's New Order regime (1966-1998), women's groups at the community level virtually disappeared with the exception of religious groups (such as prayer groups) and the PKK (Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga, the Family Welfare Guidance organisation).^{xvii} Under the New Order, the formation of state corporatist organisations—such as the PKK—was part of the state's control mechanism which sought to depoliticise society and expected to obey the state ideology Pancasila.^{xviii} As such, the PKK was subordinated to the male-dominated state and reflected in its structure in which its leaders were the wives of government officials. Moreover, New Order state policy promoted nuclear families and motherhood, and women's roles were confined to the domestic sphere.^{xix} At the village-level, the PKK became the only women's organisation that had official endorsement and disseminated the state's official gender ideology of wives and mothers' responsibilities to serve male heads of families and raise children.^{xx}

However, from the mid-1980s and throughout the 1990s some women became involved in broader movements and networks of activists that drew extensively on global human rights movement and feminist ideas that sought to counter the regime and its gender ideology. Women's organisations that emerged in this time include the resource centre Kalyanamitra, LBH-APIK (Legal Aid Foundation – Indonesian Women's Association for Justice) and Yasanti – the Annisa Swasti Foundation.^{xxi}

The end of authoritarianism in 1998 saw the opening of space for civil society organisations and was indeed a catalyst for increased women's political action.^{xxii} New women's networks, unions and other civil society organisations emerged nationally and locally throughout Indonesia, including many of the civil society organisations discussed in the research that formed the basis for this volume. At a state level, there was also increasing recognition for women's rights and issues as illustrated by the establishment of the independent National Commission on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan) in 1998. The post-authoritarian period also saw some changes to organisational structures of women's organisations established by the New Order. The PKK changed its name to the Family Welfare and Empowerment organisation, stressing 'empowerment' rather than 'guidance' as its key function. While the PKK still remains under the auspices of the Ministry of Home Affairs, its leaders are now elected and the organisation has tried to prioritise women's participation in politics and gender equality.^{xxiii} However, the PKK continues to be influenced by development priorities set by the central government and their traditional focus on women's roles as mothers and wives has been difficult to change. In many instances PKK membership has tended to be dominated by village elites and there are limitations to the extent to which the organisation pushes for an empowerment agenda, particularly among the most vulnerable of rural women.

Facilitating and Building Women's Agency

As discussed above, despite long histories of women's organising and pre-existing women's groups, across research sites in this study, at the onset of the period that this research covers, women were not necessarily included in decision-making processes nor did they participate in groups that aimed to challenge power structures and gender norms. Barriers to gender inclusion in particular are often shaped by social norms on gender roles and the way structures of authority and power are configured in societies, often privileging particular networks, families and other groups who have long been involved and influential in village life and political decision making.^{xxiv} New legislation—particularly the 2014 Village Law in this context—has not necessarily resulted in more inclusive village development decision making and priority setting despite its aims and efforts to enhance community driven development. This is particularly the case for more vulnerable women such as those experiencing poverty and challenges across multiple economic and social realms.^{xxv} In many villages throughout the archipelago, even in the instances that there is an allocation from the Village

Fund for women, these are usually assigned only to the PKK, which is typically dominated by elite women, reinforcing class-based divisions within local communities.^{xxvi}

An initial step taken by many of the CSOs involved in the study that provided support to village women with the goal of improving women's empowerment did so by collaborating with, diversifying and extending the membership and focus of existing women's groups, or by establishing new groups and initiatives. As is outlined below and in other comparative analysis, these groups provide a safe space for women to connect with other women, enhance their knowledge and awareness, and build skills.^{xxvii} Women's participation in these groups and activities facilitated greater agency and the propensity for their collective action. The stories in this edited collection chronicle the experiences of women in different parts of Indonesia—contexts that, at first glance, may have little in common. In some places, villagers have been very resistant to women taking on roles in public life and village development whereas other villages were much more conducive towards women's participation.

In our research, it was evident that there were some cohort experiences among those women who took on stronger leadership roles in driving collective action. Some women were, based on prior life experiences, more readily able to take on more influential or leadership roles when such opportunities arose. Others had not considered that they had this ability, which particularly applied for women from more vulnerable groups.

An example of a woman who had no experience in women's organisations at all was Lasinem in Gresik, who came from a poor family and held the perception that the role of married women was in the domestic sphere. However, the Women's School offered her the opportunity to expand her knowledge. Lasinem gradually became more active and eventually became a leader. Other women initially had little interest in joining women's organisations, as the story of Tari shows us, as they believed there was little benefit for them to do so. But Tari too, over time, became more active in her group and eventually emerged as a leader.

Then there are women, who had little prior involvement in women's organisations but through other life experiences had more confidence thereby lowering the barriers to becoming involved in women's collective action and village governance. Husnul (East Lombok) for instance had extensive experience in supporting her family through sewing and making crisps—while her husband worked overseas in Malaysia—which brought her in close contact with the local community. The confidence of younger women, such as Mita and Gita, was bolstered by their prior education and their roles as teachers, which enabled them to more quickly take on leadership roles and mobilise other women in their communities.

Some women were also more prominent in driving collective action because of their experience in junior roles of village governance or because of other types of connections (i.e. family), which they could use to gain support for women's issues. Mariana (Tanggamus), for instance, was appointed Hamlet Head in 2006. Ati and her niece Mita (Bangkalan) are related to influential social figures in the village, which has enabled them to gain the trust of the Village Head and other leaders.

Of the women featured in this edited volume, only one—Yohana from North Central Timor—became involved in women's activism at a young age and founded FPL's local partner organisation, YABIKU. But for most women surveyed in this volume of life stories, their experience in women's organisations at the village level was connected to the state-corporatist organisation PKK (seven of the 21 women in this volume) and in providing grassroots health services through Posyandu (Integrated Health Post – for ten women), including Husnul in East Lombok, Aminah and Farah from North Hulu Sungai, as well as Hatini and Srikandi in Cirebon. While these women were often able to draw upon organisational skills and their experiences gained in state-corporatist organisations, all highlighted the ways their experiences in new women's organisations provided them with new skills, capacities and knowledge. Cumulatively, this empowered women and enabled them to seek and achieve change in their villages through the journeys outlined in the volume. Moreover, what the

women's stories also show is that while prior experiences were helpful, they were not essential for women to take on leadership roles. In fact, the stories powerfully convey that irrespective of individual backgrounds and differences, all women were able to lead action with encouragement and support from their peers and CSOs.

Commencing and Sustaining the Journey: Facing and Overcoming Challenges and Fears

Household tensions and expectations

For many women, engaging in women's groups or activities was not without challenges, as actively participating in activities outside the household directly and indirectly challenged the norms about women's mobility and domestic roles. Lastri, for instance, explained that her husband did not give permission for her to join the Women's School. Mia, from Deli Serdang, North Sumatra, described a similar reaction from her husband, who did not want her to go to hotels and restaurants for BITRA meetings; venues considered to be unacceptable for women. However, they persisted and by showing their husbands how the newly gained information benefited their families, over time, these women gained the support of their husbands.

These stories equally portray how many women, like Ati, face continued expectations of domestic and care work alongside community involvement and operating small businesses. In Ati's case, the expectation that she would be home to be with her children after they returned from school resulted in her resolving to only attend activities that finished before 4pm in the afternoon. Her Pekka^{xxviii} group accommodated her needs by making a suitable schedule.

Lacking confidence

The new opportunities that women took up also brought to the fore some of their fears. Many had a distinct lack of confidence in public speaking and in interacting with the representatives of government offices. For instance, Aminah, a former migrant worker and single parent from North Hulu Sungai, described that she felt fear and a lack of confidence in communicating with government officials. Laila, a fisherwoman from Pangkep, was similarly afraid and explained that before joining the Women's School, when she 'saw a government official in his uniform on the pier and [she] hid, [she] was scared, scared of saying something, scared to be wrong.'

However, despite these challenges women persevered, and their confidence grew after initial uncertainty. This was a result of the support provided by women's groups and the training that the women received. Mia's confidence, for instance, faltered when she was asked to speak in public but, as she recounted, 'I kept trying, I just forced myself to be brave'. Similarly, Lastri who said she used to tremble even when she was only asked to introduce herself, found the confidence to speak in public. Even Hatini, who was more experienced in expressing her opinion in public, was initially reluctant to do so, yet after taking part in 'Aisyiyah's cadre program considers herself 'confident to talk, to put forward [my] opinion.'

Resistance to women taking on leadership roles or challenging influential actors

Women were not only faced with challenges and resistance as they started becoming active in women's groups, but also as they emerged as female leaders. Veronika, for instance, faced pressure from her family after a family member was involved in a domestic violence case. Veronika's family asked her not to pursue the case. Veronika recounted how she explained to her family that the case 'needed to be handled and reported to the police. It should not be silenced, and it cannot be finalised by the family'.

Sometimes, strong measures have been taken to silence women. Julianti, for instance, recalled how after she challenged village government officials and schoolteachers about low teacher attendance at a local school, the principal threatened her with black magic. After she became very ill for two years, a *dukun* (traditional healer)

told her that she had fallen victim to black magic. While she was ill, Julianti was advised by those who visited her to stop her activities in the Women's School, as they believed this had made her ill. Julianti, however refused to give up her advocacy for families and education: 'the larger the challenge, the more I like it. I am an island girl, big waves pass, they just pass.'

Facilitating and Building Skills, Capacity and Confidence

Through group activities in safe spaces, women did not only gradually become more confident in skills such as public speaking. Livelihood skills training generated significant improvements in women's economic independence and capabilities. In several stories, women told of their aspirations for their children to continue their education. Hatini attributes the ability to secure education for her children to the enhanced economic skills she gained as an 'Aisyiyah cadre. Similarly, Hj. Nisa in Central Lombok gained skills to sew school uniforms for her children and make and sell cakes and other snacks in the La Tansa group for ex-migrant worker women. This collection of stories also illustrates how women like Hatini and Tari brought home knowledge and skills they gained and taught their daughters about gender equality, inspiring young women to join women's groups and pursue higher education to work for gender justice.

The information and skills women received also enhanced their confidence in standing up for themselves at home. Julianti's husband, for instance, demanded that she no longer be involved in the Women's School. Julianti, however, refused and attributed her confidence to do so to the training she received through the Women's School, which in her view, made Julianti value her own body, and self, more. Lastri, a Women's School member in Gresik, felt empowered to access health services that her husband mistrusted and, with her friends, challenged a nurse who requested her husband's signature to access care.

Beyond the domestic sphere, the support and trainings offered by women's groups also helped many of the women featured in this edited collection feel more confident in interacting with government officials and speaking up for women's needs. Farah, for instance, explained how now she was confident enough to speak up whether it was at the village or district level. Similarly, together with other Pekka members, Aminah advocated for a Village Regulation to set up a Village-Owned Enterprise (BUMDes), requiring her to deal with various representatives from the village government. Meanwhile Lasinem—who initially rarely went to the Village Office —also became more confident to express her opinions in public, including in official village meetings.

Enhancing Knowledge and Awareness

When read together, these life stories show that we can identify a number of shared themes and stages of empowerment for women living in a diverse range of village contexts. For many women, initial exposure to and engagement in women's organisations led to both surprise and confusion. Lasinem for instance, described how the knowledge about gender at the Women's School contradicted all she had learned at school and from her parents. Similarly, Lastri's experience illustrates that for women who had previously not been involved in any organisation, receiving an invitation to a group meeting alone was cause for confusion.

At the same time, this novelty also made many women curious. Widyati in Bantul, for instance, told that she was interested to join any organisation, 'to gain experiences'. Meanwhile, Tari—who was initially not interested in joining FPL's local partner SPI Labuhan Batu at all—was surprised that she found the information interesting and gradually became more involved and, eventually, became a group leader.

Through their active participation in women's groups, women together enhanced their knowledge of a wide variety of issues including governance structures, healthcare, civil rights and access to social security programs. They did not only become more aware of gender issues in their own lives, but also became more sensitive towards the issues that women face in their local communities, creating a sense of solidarity among them.

Creating Networks, Building a Sense of Purpose

Women also found comfort in their fellow group members and networks. Almost all women referred to the ability that these groups gave them to *curhat*, or to confide in others. Julianti, for instance, described how much she enjoyed coming together with other women: 'I did not know anything about these four islands, ... and now I do. I received lots of inputs from friends, and we could share [our experiences]. [I now have] many friends from other villages, we are close like family'. Similarly, Farah explained that through the Pekka women's groups she was able to express her frustrations and receive support from other members. Laeli described the support she received as 'predominantly mentally. With many acquaintances, it is not [as] difficult [as it might be]'. This environment led women to recruit more members, thereby growing and diversifying membership of the groups.

Women also benefited on a deeply personal level. Many women described changes within their families, including improved bargaining positions, increased awareness of gender equality and a more equal distribution of household chores. Other changes are often intangible and hard to measure or express. Widyati, for instance, described how participating in Yasanti's gender classes over two years boosted her self-belief. Similarly, Mariana felt that before she took part in FAKTA-DAMAR gender awareness classes in Tanggamus, she 'didn't socialise or believe in [her]self'. Mariana now feels more confident and comfortable taking a lead role in events in her work with the PKK, as what she learned 'was truly beneficial'. Laeli, the head of a Constituent Group in East Lombok, also felt self-assured to access the network that BaKTI field staff introduced her to in order to certify her small business.

For women like Srikandi in Cirebon and Lastri in Gresik, women's groups also provide a sense of purpose and space to continue education. As Lastri described, while she was unable to continue her formal education to the high school level, 'as it happened, at the Women's School I had an opportunity to continue school', and that she 'still has a desire to learn.' For other, typically younger, women like Mita and Gita who are the first in their families, and in Mita's case community, to graduate from university, participating in women's organisations has provided opportunities for them to gain employment and skills to certify businesses. With the self-belief and assurance gained, both Gita and Mita have been able to both pursued careers and establish families, thereby challenging social norms that married women have no role beyond the domestic sphere.

Meanwhile, changes at the level of village government include increased inclusion of women in village decision-making forums, while within many communities there is an enhanced awareness of gender issues. Both in North Sumatra and East Lombok, women have become more confident to report on cases of domestic violence. In North Central Timor, Veronika emphasised how being a member of the paralegal group that responds to cases of domestic violence has shaped her sense of identity and commitment to justice which 'must be upheld, where there is wrong it is wrong, and what is right must be protected.' The strong motivation expressed by Veronika is also evident in many other stories. Srikandi states that the 2019 recognition of her work by President Joko Widodo has motivated her to do more for the village community and especially women. This demonstrates how women reconfigured their sense of identity through the knowledge, capacities and networks gained through women's groups.

Structure of the Volume

The volume is structured around five core themes and focus areas. The first section contains eight excerpts of life stories that show how women have improved access to social protection. Four of these women—Ati, Mita, Aminah and Farah—are members of their village's Pekka Union (Serikat Pekka). Through PEKKA's Village Consultation and Information Service Clinics, these women and their colleagues in Bangkalan in East Java and North Hulu Sungai in South Kalimantan have assisted villagers in gaining vital citizenship documents, such as identity cards, marriage certificates, and family cards, which are required to access social protection and assistance programs. In both places, Pekka Unions have provided a supportive meeting place for the female heads of families—who are among some of the most vulnerable to poverty—and mutual support through savings and loans groups. This section also shares the journeys of four women who are members of KAPAL Perempuan's Women's School groups: Lasinem and Lastri from Gresik, East Java; and Laila and Julianti from Pangkajene and Islands District in South Sulawesi. These stories provide us with insights into the process of learning about gender equality, and in the cases of Laila and Julianti, the application of skills developed in women's groups to advocate for community needs.

The second section features the journeys of Gita and Nisa and their work to promote safe migration and support to former migrant workers and their families in Central Lombok, supported by Migrant CARE and its local partner the Panca Karsa Association. Gita's story shows how involvement in participatory data collection and policy advocacy and change led her to have the self-belief and assurance to pursue her teaching career in a disadvantaged community. Nisa's journey begins by describing her experiences as an overseas migrant worker in Saudi Arabia and her financial challenges after returning to Lombok, both of which led to the creation of the La Tansa group for ex-migrant worker women who support each other and have collectively developed livelihood skills.

The third section concentrates on two women's contributions to improving the working conditions of homeworkers. The story of Mia, a member of the Prosperous Homeworkers Union (SPR Sejahtera) in Deli Serdang, North Sumatra, describes her leadership journey and how through representing women homeworkers she gained confidence in dealing with government officials. The story of Widyati, a member of the Creative Mothers group in Bantul, Yogyakarta, portrays how learning about labour rights, safe working conditions and gender enabled business expansion and for the group to be represented in the formulation of the village's mid-term development plan.

The fourth section shares the journeys of four women who have worked to improve women's health and nutrition. As Balai Sakinah 'Aisyiyah members and reproductive health cadres, Hatini and Srikandi in Cirebon, West Java, have expanded their involvement in community healthcare from members of the PKK and Posyandu to leaders in responding to women's needs and socialising the importance of early detection for cancers. Both stories portray the deeply personal nature of this work, which Srikandi refers to as her 'obligation' (*kewajiban*). In Tanggamus, Lampung, Sumatra, Sulis and Mariana's life stories similarly suggest that gender awareness and leadership training can extend and develop existing community leaders. Sulis and Mariana participated in, and now are leaders of, FAKTA-DAMAR's gender mainstreaming classes. Both stories demonstrate how women put into action new understandings of gender equality in their own lives and families and sought to teach others.

The final section focusses on the journeys of five women who have worked to reduce violence against women in their communities in North Sumatra, East Lombok, and North Central Timor. In Labuhan Batu, North Sumatra, Tari has represented the Labuhan Batu Independent Women's Union (SPI) at village meetings and was integral to the drafting and implementation of a 2018 Village Regulation on the Protection of Women and Children. In East Lombok, Laeli is the Chairperson of the Mele Maju Constituent Group in which Husnul is also a member. Together they have worked to provide paralegal support to victim-survivors of domestic violence

and have successfully advocated for village funding be allocated to improving health services. In North Central Timor, Veronika has also worked in providing paralegal assistance to victim-survivors and describes how she is proud to have gained knowledge and experiences from her work. Veronika cites Yohana, whose life story is also presented in this section, as a major source of inspiration. Yohana, the founder of the Forum for Service Providers (FPL) regional partner YABIKU served as a representative of the District Parliament (DPRD) from 2014 – 2019, during which two regulations on the protection of women and children were successfully formulated by a coalition of organisations and were ratified as district regulations. From legislation to frontline support, this section highlights the many ways in which women are supporting victim-survivors and working to change the gender and social norms that make many women reluctant to report their experiences of violence.

By showcasing women's own words, turns of phrase, ways of expressing emotion, and perceptions of change this volume contributes valuable situated perspectives on community development and gender in rural Indonesia. These stories are snapshots of how women consider and tell their journey so far: major moments that have punctuated their lives; influential relationships and friends; new knowledge and opportunities. This edited volume offers windows into women's strength and resilience in the face of gender norms that restrict the socially acceptable spaces and roles for women, poverty, and other challenges. These life journeys do not follow a linearly progressive narrative structure, but rather underline the importance of mutual support from friends and civil society organisations that enable women to overcome resistance and barriers. Each story finishes by looking outwards at each woman aspirations and hopes, a reminder that while these women have achieved significant positive change, they remain aware of and focused on addressing present challenges, expanding participation, and creating further opportunities for a better future.

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ⁱⁱ Law No. 31/2002 and Law No.12/2003.

ⁱⁱⁱ E.S. Prihatini, "Electoral (In)quality", *Inside Indonesia* 135 (January – March 2019): <https://www.insideindonesia.org/electoral-in-equity>.

^{iv} Law No. 23/2004.

^v A.M. Pratiwi, "The Policies, Practices, and Politics of Women Representation in Political Parties: A Case Study of Women Members of Parliament in Regency/City-level Legislative Council Period 2014-2019", *Jurnal Perempuan* 24:2 (2019): 151-163.

^{vi} Komisi Nasional Anti Kekerasan Terhadap Perempuan, *Kekerasan Meningkat: Kebijakan Penghapusan Kekerasan Seksual untuk Membangun Ruang Aman bagi Perempuan dan Anak Perempuan. Catatan Kekerasan Terhadap Perempuan Tahun 2019* [Violence Increases: Policies for the Elimination of Sexual Violence to Build a Safe Space for Women and Girls. Notes on Violence Against Women in 2019] (Jakarta: Komnas Perempuan, 2020): https://www.komnasperempuan.go.id/file/pdf_file/2020/Catatan%20Tahunan%20Kekerasan%20Terhadap%20Perempuan%202020.pdf.

^{vii} R. Diprose, A. Savirani, K.M.P. Setiawan & N. Francis, 2020, *Women's Collective Action and the Village Law: How Women are Driving Change and Shaping Pathways for Gender-inclusive Development in Rural Indonesia*. The University of Melbourne, Universitas Gadjah Mada and MAMPU. <https://doi.org/10.46580/124326>. Available at: www.mampu.or.id and www.demisetara.org.

^{viii} The CSOs in this research, partners of the Australia-Indonesia Partnership for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (MAMPU), were 'Aisyiah (women's organisation associated with the Islamic mass organisation Muhammadiyah), BaKTI (The Eastern Indonesia Knowledge Exchange Foundation), BITRA (Indonesian Foundation for Rural Capacity Building), DAMAR (Institute for Women's Advocacy) and its district partner FAKTA as a part of PERMAMPU (Consortium of Women's Organisations in Sumatra), FPL (Forum for Service Providers) and its local partners YABIKU (Village Women's Care Foundation, East Nusa Tenggara) and SPI (Independent Women's Union, North Sumatra), KAPAL Perempuan (The Institute for Women's Alternative Education) and its local partners YKPM (South Sulawesi) and KPS2SK (East Java), Migrant CARE and its local partner the Panca Karsa Association (West Nusa Tenggara), PEKKA (Female-Headed Families Empowerment Program) and Yasanti (Annisa Swasti Foundation). These CSOs have varied internal structures, i.e. some are aligned with mass organisations, whereas others are foundations or institutes. Some CSOs work independently, whereas others work in partnership with other organisations. For a comprehensive discussion of CSO internal structures and the models of support for women's groups provided, as well as opportunities and trade-offs associated with each structure, see R. Diprose, A. Savirani, K.M.P. Setiawan & N. Francis, 2020, *Women's Collective Action and the Village Law*, Section 6.

^{ix} Research was conducted in nine provinces, twelve districts and fourteen villages (twelve villages were core research sites and two control village sites). In-depth interviews were conducted with more than 450 people, and another 150 were involved in thirty focus group discussions.

^x Hj. stands for “Hajjah” and is the title for a woman who has performed the *hajj* to Mekka.

^{xi} Klinik Layanan Informasi dan Konsultasi – KLIK.

^{xii} S.B. Gluck, “Women’s Oral History: Is It So Special?”, in T.L. Charlton, L.E. Myers and R. Sharpless *Thinking about Oral History* (New York: AltaMira, 2008), 129-131, 139; R.I. Rahayu, “Menulis Sejarah Sebagaimana Perempuan: Pendekatan Filsafat Sejarah Perempuan [Writing History as a Woman: Approaches to the Philosophy of Women’s History], *Jurnal Sejarah dan Budaya* (2016): 109.

^{xiii} S. Blackburn, *Women and the State in Modern Indonesia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 18; B.A. Beech Jones, “Narrating intimate violence in public texts: Women’s writings in the Sumatran newspaper *Soenting Melajoe*” In McGregor, A. Dragojlovic and H. Loney., *Gender, Violence and Power in Indonesia Across Time and Space*, (London & New York: Routledge, 2020), 19-28.

^{xiv} S. Blackburn, “Feminism and the women’s movement in the world’s largest Islamic nation”, in M. Roces & L. Edwards (eds.), *Women’s Movements in Asia. Feminisms and Transnational Activism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 21-33.

^{xv} S.G. Davies, “Women in politics in Indonesia in the decade post-Beijing”, *International Social Science Journal* 57:184 (2005): 232.

^{xvi} S.E. Wieringa, “The birth of the New Order state in Indonesia: sexual politics and nationalism”, *Journal of Women’s History* 15 (2003): 70-91.

^{xvii} Migunani, *Women’s Collective Action for Empowerment in Indonesia: A Study of Collective Action Initiated by Partners of the MAMPU Program* (Yogyakarta: Migunani and MAMPU, 2017), 2.

^{xviii} M. Nyman, *Democratising Indonesia. The Challenges of Civil Society in the Era of Reformasi* (Denmark: NIAS Press, 2006).

^{xix} K. Robinson, *Gender, Islam and democracy in Indonesia*. (London & New York: Routledge, 2008).

^{xx} K. Robinson, “Indonesian National Identity and the Citizen Mother”, *Communal/Plural* 3 (1994): 65-81.

^{xxi} Blackburn, *Women and the State*, 27-8.

^{xxii} Davies, “Women in Politics in Indonesia”.

^{xxiii} K.H. Dewi, *Indonesian women and local politics: Islam, Gender, and Networks in post-Suharto Indonesia* (Singapore: NUS & Kyoto University Press, 2015), 45.

^{xxiv} Diprose, Savirani, Setiawan and Francis, *Women’s Collective Action and the Village Law in Indonesia*.

^{xxv} M. Syukri, P.P. Bachtiar, A. Kurniawan, G.M.S. Sedyadi, Kartawijaya, R.A. Diningrat & U. Alifia, *Study of the Implementation of Law No. 6/2014 on Villages: Baseline Report* (Jakarta: The SMERU Research Institute, 2017).

^{xxvi} Diprose, Savirani, Setiawan & Francis, *Women’s Collective Action and the Village Law*.

^{xxvii} Diprose, Savirani, Setiawan & Francis, *Women’s Collective Action and the Village Law*.

^{xxviii} PEKKA refers to the organisation, the Female-Headed Families Empowerment Program, whereas “Pekka” denotes unions (*serikat*) and groups formed and led by village women.



Part 1:

Improving Access to Social Protection Programs

Ati

Pekka Village Coordinator

Bangkalan, Madura, East Java¹

Thirty-eight-year-old Ati has been Pekka group coordinator in her village in Bangkalan since 2015. She is also principal of a kindergarten, which she established in 2013, and runs her family household. Ati married at the age of eighteen and currently has two children. Together with her husband from the same village, Ati owns a marquee and sound system rental business which is well known in the area.

Ati's involvement in Pekka began with the encouragement of her cousin, Mukti, who is a local community leader. In 2015, PEKKA² began running activities in Ati's village and requested the assistance of the Village Head to find women to join a women's group. The Village Head then requested that Mukti, who is known as being skilled in *silat* martial arts and as a Qur'an teacher, ask Ati to help with Pekka's activities. Ati was trusted to take on this role because of her experiences as a Posyandu cadre and a leader in the Nahdlatul Ulama women's organisation Muslimat. Ati accepted this nomination to join Pekka as she felt that it showed how village leaders believed in her. Moreover, the Village Head at the time was the step-son of Umi, Ati's Qur'anic studies teacher when she was a teenager.

Ati recounted, in the Madurese dialect of Indonesian, how when the village group was formed, she was regularly visited by PEKKA fieldworkers from the Bangkalan subdistrict. As well as visiting Ati's house, these fieldworkers invited Ati to join cadre meetings. At the time, PEKKA did not yet have a permanent office, so these meetings rotated between cadres' houses in Bangkalan.

"[At first] I didn't understand what PEKKA was, but I was always visited by Mbak Fat [PEKKA leader at the subdistrict level]. Every time there was a meeting, she visited. Then, in the end, I understood what PEKKA was and that there was a monthly cadre meeting [I could go to]. But there wasn't an office then. The meetings sometimes moved. I was called when there was a cadre meeting and sometimes when I tried to find it, [I was like] 'where is it?', I looked but couldn't find it. I can read and write, but not really well." (Ati, Bangkalan research village, 25 February 2019)

The trust placed in Ati to become a Pekka cadre also stemmed from the networks she had formed since the 1990s. When PEKKA entered her village in 2015, Ati was a Posyandu cadre. She has a strong relationship with the village midwife and organises the maternal and child health group (Posyandu) for under five year olds, pregnant women, and the elderly. Likewise, Ati is well known by mothers as she and her niece, Mita, founded the only kindergarten in her hamlet. She also leads a forty-member strong Muslimat Qur'an recitation group (*pengajian*) which includes both young and older women. This strong network places Ati at the centre of women's activities and organisations in the village. This network meant that, not long after being selected as a Pekka cadre, Ati successfully recruited approximately twenty five members to the newly formed Pekka union.

Ati began to understand the PEKKA movement after she was invited to assist the Service, Information and Consultation Clinic (KLIK – PEKKA) in a neighbouring village. Ati assisted people as they arrived and helped

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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.

² PEKKA refers to the organisation whereas, Pekka refers to the grassroots organising of women lead by village women.

establish the order in which people would be seen – an experience which made a large impression on her about how PEKKA assists the community.

“There were ustad [Muslim clerics], community, leaders and the Village Head. It was there that my knowledge continued to expand.” (Ati, Bangkalan research village, 25 February 2019)

As the group’s leader, Ati plays a crucial role in organising its activities. Ati’s husband supports this work, upon the condition that her activities do not take a whole day or involve overnight stays.

“My children have already grown up, they are independent. When I participate in Pekka activities, they [often] go all day... One time there was a three day training session at the Head of the Pekka union’s house until Maghrib prayers at about seven in the evening. My husband gets angry at me for going to those all-day activities... Yeah, I get pretty scared. If I went to the training all day, then my children would want to get ready for school and who would take care of them? ... But now the latest time training finishes is 4pm in the afternoon. We all make a schedule.” (Ati, Bangkalan research village, 25 February 2019)

Ati drew upon her experience of forming a Muslimat *pengajian* group in the newly established Pekka union. She invited members to save money together in a savings and loans group based on their own financial capacities, which became a major drawcard for new members to join.

“[Members saved] individually, sometimes the individual savings totalled 200 thousand rupiah a year while other people saved 500 thousand rupiah a year. Members contributed 5,000 rupiah twice a month and some people contributed 10,000 [once a month]. The point was to save hundreds of thousands.” (Ati, Bangkalan research village, 25 February 2019)

Access to loans for household necessities is a major need for women in Ati’s village. The Pekka savings and loans group was different from the Muslimat NU group which deposited its savings in a bank managed by a *pesantren* in the subdistrict. Pekka’s savings and loan group contributions are deposited to Pekka’s Marlina Union cooperative in Bangkalan. Annually, Ati’s twenty-five member strong Pekka group saved five million rupiah (500 AUD). In 2017, an issue occurred with the cooperative’s finances and to this day Ati remains unsure about what caused it. As the Pekka group’s leader, Ati used her own money to repay savings and loan group members to prevent their disappointment, and she was later reimbursed by PEKKA.

Later in 2017, Ati decided to reduce her involvement with Pekka. Ati says that she decided to step back from her leadership position because it was difficult for her to travel to activities. Ati cannot drive a motorbike and many Pekka group activities take place at the subdistrict PEKKA office which is approximately ten kilometres from her house. As there is limited access to public minibuses (*angkutan*), Ati found it difficult to visit the centre without someone driving her there. When Ati stepped down from her leadership role, the Pekka group also began to wane as members decided to stop attending activities until Ati returned.

“I didn’t have a companion, so I said to [the subdistrict Head of Pekka] in 2017 and 2018, ‘I want to stop, I’m stepping down.’ She said, ‘you can’t step down, you can’t step down Ati.’ I stepped down, I didn’t have a companion, or friends, I was just facing problems alone. She said, ‘you can’t step down but it’s okay if you have a break if no one can drive you here.’ So, I wasn’t active, and my groups weren’t either for a year.” (Ati, Bangkalan research village, 25 February 2019)

Ati became active in Pekka again in 2018 when her niece, Mita, completed her university studies and returned to the village. As a Pekka cadre, Mita successfully assisted Ati in reviving one of the hamlet-level Pekka groups

which Ati had founded which now has forty members. Ati revived another hamlet Pekka group and successfully recruited one hundred members to join it.

These groups' activities, notably Qur'an recitation, were integrated with materials about women's empowerment and equality. At least once a month, Pekka union officials from the district take it in turns to visit the group and raise awareness about the importance of legal identity documents. Through these discussions, PEKKA supports group members learn to understand their civic rights so that they can access basic health and education services as well as government social protection programs. At the same time as participating in these empowerment activities, group members manage their collective funds, and each member contributes two thousand rupiah (0.20 AUD) and voluntary extra savings at their weekly meetings.

Ati's leadership has successfully created change for herself and the women's group. Despite these changes, Ati's village does not yet fully support the inclusion of women in the public sphere as social norms tend to assign public roles to men, while women are limited to the domestic sphere. As Ati explains, many people in the village believe that:

"There is no point in girls going to school because it will leave families in debt. [They say] there's no need to go to school. Mita was told by the extended family to stop attending school from middle school. Many people still say, 'my child has graduated, so they will study. The most a woman can become is a cook, so what do they want to become?' Mita was the first woman from either the west or east hamlet to study at university. That's why the head of the PEKKA union said to other women, 'let's go, prove to the community, develop yourself, join Pekka to prove yourself to the community.'" (Ati, Bangkalan research village, 25 February 2019)

Together with her niece, Ati remains committed to providing a space and opportunity for women to meet, save, and share their opinions together. Through these hamlet groups, women in Ati's village have started to understand their rights and position at the centre of their community.

Mita

Pekka Cadre

Bangkalan Madura, East Java¹

Twenty-three-year-old Mita is the second child of a former Hamlet Head in a village in Bangkalan district. She has been active in Pekka since her aunt Ati invited her to join. While she was studying at university, Mita worked as a teacher at a kindergarten which she and Ati established and taught children to read the Qur'an at her family's small prayer house (*langgar*).

Mita is the first woman in her village to graduate from university. Mita was determined to realise her dream of education, a dream which was supported by her family who all value learning. After finishing her schooling at a *pesantren*, Mita decided to study education at Trunojoyo University in Madura. After she graduated in 2018, Mita taught Indonesian and science at the local Islamic middle school twice a week. Alongside this teaching work, Mita and her aunt Ati run the only private kindergarten in their village. The journey to establish this kindergarten was not without challenges. While she was studying, Mita was only able to teach on the weekend when she returned to the village, so on other days Ati taught students religious studies.

"At the beginning, the kindergarten was with the maternal and child health group, so at the same time kids went to school. Auntie Ati didn't teach at the start, I had two months of holidays so for that 2 months I taught. Kids didn't know how to write the letter 'A', so one by one I drew the line up and down and spoke to them in Madurese because kids don't understand Indonesian ... And in the end, I felt it was successful, I was happy because at the beginning kids didn't know how to do it at all. Kids didn't know how to sound out words, r-e-ea-ead, like that. At the start they didn't know the letter 'A' at all." (Mita, Bangkalan research village, 20 February 2019)

For Mita, the kindergarten is her way of demonstrating that women should not just be identified with domestic work as they can contribute to their community. During her spare time while studying, Mita sought out information and widened her networks to help her effort to certify the kindergarten. The first step in this process was to establish a foundation.

"It was me who finally put the banner up, over there on the wooden frame. I worked on it with my mother, my aunt and her daughter. I hammered in the nails and tied the rope with my mother. My father was busy somewhere else, so I did it so it would be done quickly." (Mita, Bangkalan research village, 20 February 2019)

Mita's establishment of the Badrur Rohim Foundation was testament to both all the information she had gained from her university friends who went on to become members of the Indonesian Teacher's Association, and Mita's own confidence to ask for permission to register the kindergarten at the necessary government office. After making inquiries about registration, Mita was told that she needed to pay a fee to process the kindergarten's certification – another challenge and step in the journey so that the kindergarten she had established with her family would be certified and licenced to operate.

"My friend in Surabaya received money from a savings group. 'It's okay [take it]', she said. My father didn't have any money either. How would I get the 2 million rupiah to pay for the fee? 'It's okay, I got the money from the savings group.' My friend said that you don't have to pay back family.' The point was

¹**Authors:** Indah Surya Wardhani 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.

that she was giving the money to me... giving me two million rupiah... because my father didn't have any money... so I used her money for the kindergarten. Then there was 500,000 more, and my father didn't have the money again, he didn't have it at all. I asked the agent to charge the extra 500,000 to my aunt's account who saves money there. And it was done, the licence was finished. It was issued and the kindergarten was official." (Mita, Bangkalan research village, 20 February 2019)

Mita's involvement with Pekka began when her aunt Ati, who is a Pekka coordinator, invited her to join. In 2018, as part of PEKKA's focus on the fulfilment of social rights, Mita began processing marriage verification documents and Family Cards for her neighbours and younger family members. To do this, Mita visited the Village Office, Religious Affairs Office, the Sub-District Office, the Population and Civil Registration Office in Bangkalan, and the office of the Religious Court.

At the beginning, Mita often felt that she was taking work away from village officials. The Village Office offered to process documents for villagers for a fee of 150,000 rupiah (15 AUD) per Family Card or Identity Card. For a letter legalising an informal marriage, villagers often used unofficial agents who charged between one to two million rupiah (100-200 AUD) to process the required documents. However, after she started processing these documents through official channels for villagers, Mita observed how villagers who felt scared and embarrassed to apply for these documents themselves at the Village Office valued her assistance.

Since 2018, Mita has also played a large role in the rejuvenation of hamlet-level Pekka groups. Together with Ati, she was successful in initially recruiting forty members. A year later, Mita and Ati also formed a weekly prayer group (*yasinan*) which takes place every Friday. Mita hopes to share materials on gender equality and women's social rights through these events, which Mita and Ati envisage as a first step toward involving other women as Pekka cadres and forming new groups.

Mita also challenged a culture of marrying young. In contrast to most young women in the village who marry and become mothers as teenagers, Mita married at the age of twenty three in mid-2019. Mita's parents continue to encourage her to pursue knowledge through higher education and put this knowledge into practice by teaching, even though she is now married. Moreover, her family and husband are supportive of Mita continuing to work with Pekka and manage the kindergarten.

While there were challenges in achieving the certification of the kindergarten, Mita and Ati are certain that they will always champion social and educational rights. Mita hopes that all children in the village can have the opportunity to attend university like she did. Looking forward, in her leadership in Pekka, one of her greatest dreams is to be able to visit the PEKKA Foundation in Jakarta and meet with cadres from all over Indonesia.

"I really want to be invited to Jakarta, to the PEKKA National Secretariat. It would be amazing. I want to go to a big city like Jakarta. I am active in Pekka so maybe I will be invited to go there in the future." (Mita, Bangkalan research village, 20 February 2019)

In the village, Mita hopes that she can become a Village Official and be involved in decision making, particularly about village women's needs. She also hopes to motivate other women in the village to become economically independent through education and organisations. Since Mita graduated from university in 2018, approximately twenty young people from the village have pursued higher education.

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 out 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.

Lastri

District Women's School Coordinator

Gresik, East Java²

Thirty-year-old Lastri is the Gresik District Women's School coordinator. She was born into a poor family and is the youngest of three children. Lastri, who is from this village, married a man from a neighbouring village and now has a son and a daughter.

Lastri finished her education at the middle school level, like many women her age. As Lastri's family works as farm labourers who earn a low wage, they often found it difficult to pay for everyday needs, let alone for her education. As a result, after finishing primary school, Lastri's parents did not allow her to continue her schooling because of their economic circumstances. Both of her older siblings were also unable to continue their education for financial reasons: one graduated from primary school and the other from middle school. Lastri was able to continue her education to middle school as she found a school which would provide her with a scholarship. However, her dreams to continue learning were of going to school was cut short after economic reasons prevented her from continuing to high school.

"At the start of middle school I really wanted to go to school. But my parents didn't allow me. I had already finished primary school and initially I wasn't allowed to go to school because my parents couldn't afford it. But I desperately wanted to go to middle school, so I found a school that had a scholarship. Then, it came time for high school, and I thought high school would be more expensive. And it dawned on me, the anxiety that my parents really couldn't afford it. So, I worked." (Lastri, Gresik research village, 22 February 2019)

In 2004, at the age of fifteen, Lastri decided to find work to help her family. She worked as a day labourer in a bread factory where her wage was determined by how much bread she packed, rather than a set daily wage. Every day Lastri took home between fifteen and twenty thousand rupiah (1.5-2 AUD). After a while, she decided to stop work because her hours were too long – from early morning until nine o'clock at night – however, eventually Lastri returned to the factory. It was here in 2008 that Lastri met the man who would become her husband.

When the part of the bread factory where she worked burnt down, Lastri was moved by the company to another area. As a result, Lastri had to start at the bottom of the pay scale as a day labourer rather than as a worker with a daily wage. Lastri did not agree with this decision that the company had made without consulting her. Lastri met with factory management to convey her complaints, however, management rejected her claims. In the end, Lastri decided to leave the factory in 2013 and become a vegetable seller at the market.

In the same year, Lastri became involved in an informal Women's School, after a staff member from KPS2K (Women's Groups and Sources of Life³) visited her house and invited her to attend the first meeting of the Women's School. This invitation made Lastri feel very confused as she had never been invited to attend a meeting at the Village Office. She had only attended the Village Office to receive financial assistance and vote.

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³ Kelompok Perempuan dan Sumber-Sumber Kehidupan.

Lastri's friends from the factory suggested that she should not attend the meeting, but after a KPS2K staff member visited her and called back afterwards, Lastri decided to attend because she wanted to know more about what this event involved.

"Then I felt confused and so did my husband, that's the word for it: confused. I asked my friends at the factory and told them that someone came to my house and invited me to go to the Village Hall, and what did they think...should I go or not? They said, 'don't go, Las, you're being taken in by spies, don't go'. So, I decided I wouldn't go. Then I kept being called by the KPS2K staff member, are you coming or not? Are you coming or not? Ok, I felt in my heart, I'll just go. I'll see what the meeting is like." (Lastri, Gresik research village, 19 February 2019)

After the meeting, Lastri told her husband that the Women's School was going to be formed. Her husband and parents did not give permission for Lastri to join because they felt that the Women's School was not a way for her to earn money. Lastri felt torn. While they were not allowing her to get involved for financial reasons, she had never had the experience of being in an organisation and had not been able to continue her dream of going to school.

"The first obstacle [was one] I faced myself. How could I make a decision which was in conflict with my family and my husband who were not letting me join. It was how I could continue my schooling. That's what I had convinced my heart for a long time, it was between doing it or not, like when I didn't continue school. It turns out at the Women's School I had the opportunity to continue school. Because I thought the Women's School was the same as high school. I had a desire to learn, I still have the desire." (Lastri, Gresik research village, 22 February 2019)

Lastri does not have a lot of time to participate in the Women's School because she works in the market. Nevertheless, she participated in the first training session on Women's Leadership and Social Protection in 2014. At the training, Lastri was given information on gender equality, especially about women's rights in families.

"Women have the right to make decisions about what is right and wrong, like in the family environment. We have social protection, rights to be fought for. When I got home, I put them into action." (Lastri, Gresik research village 19 February 2019)

Lastri's husband felt outraged when she explained to him about the information she had gained at the training. He asked her to choose between the school and her family. Instead, Lastri chose both. For her, this was a valuable opportunity to prove women's strength. Lastri's husband often asked her to do extra work when she asked him to allow her to go to activities, like finding fodder, washing, and cleaning out the pen of their animals. Sometimes, Lastri decided pragmatically to let her husband be mad when she returned from Women's School activities. This did not make her feel disheartened but, on the contrary, was Lastri's strategy to negotiate with him and continue to be involved in the Women's School. When she finished all the work he had told her to do, there was no reason left for her husband to not let her participate in the School.

Lastri feels fortunate to have friends from the School who support her and understand if she comes late to events. Her friends even delay activities and wait for Lastri to join them after she has finished her work. The Women's School has made Lastri closer with her friends who share each other's happiness and sadness, so that one person's burden can be shouldered together.

Since taking part in training and attending activities at the Women's School, Lastri feels that she has increased her understanding of gender equity as well as her strategies and capacities. She increased her understanding of how to negotiate with her husband after sharing her experiences with friends and together building their critical awareness at the Women's School.

"If he gets angry it's not like it was before. Now I can negotiate. Before if my husband was angry, I would also get angry and we would fight. Now if my husband is very angry, I let him be angry first and then later when he has calmed down, I will explain." (Lastri, Gresik research village, 22 February 2019)

Gradually, Lastri's husband became more willing to help with household tasks, like sweeping and washing dishes. More importantly, he also began to realise his wife's capacities and strength. Lastri continued to become more attuned to women's issues and share the knowledge and experiences she had gained with other women in her area. At any opportunity, Lastri invites women to join the Women's School. Many village women initially labelled the Women's School an improper organisation which taught women to go outside their homes and disobey their husbands, and even thought that members were "district spies". Lastri and her friends have worked hard to counter these accusations and have proved the School's value by working together with the National Insurance Scheme (BPJS) to help community members process cards needed to access the scheme, Healthy Indonesia (Indonesia Sehat) programs, and other forms of government social protection.

In 2015, Lastri had the opportunity to represent the Women's School at a training session in Jakarta. Before she departed, Lastri thought she was pregnant after taking a home pregnancy test and experiencing bleeding. While in Jakarta, the bleeding continued and Lastri had to be taken to hospital for treatment, and the event organisers covered the costs. Later that year, Lastri was diagnosed with cervical cancer. Despite having had symptoms since she worked in the factory, including discharge and constant itchiness, she had not followed this up with a doctor. Before her diagnosis, Lastri's husband had encouraged her to be treated in traditional ways, like drinking a herbal remedy (*jamu*) made from lime powder. Through her experience at the Women's School, Lastri understood women's rights to healthcare and common conditions. She also processed a Healthy Indonesia Free Recipient card with which she could access free health checks at hospitals which partnered with the Women's School.

Lastri had this health check because of her networks and friends who helped her and other community members to process their cards. Although her husband's opinions about the importance of health checks had not changed, Lastri was able to access the services to which she was entitled.

"In the end it was at that second [check]. From the discharge it was clear that I had cervical cancer. My husband was still very angry. I was told to just drink jamu. I wasn't allowed to go to the hospital. But I went by myself with Mbak Indah and Mbak Nurul [Women's School leaders]. For the paperwork they needed my husband's signature and said that he needed to be unemployed [for me to access to services], the woman at the hospital got angry at me, and when I got home [he] got angry at me. 'I don't need your signature [her husband's] and I'm not asking for it', I said. Then, the second time, I took control and went to the hospital by myself on a public minibus." (Lastri, Gresik research village, 22 February 2019)

After this experience, Lastri and the Women's School initiated early detection checks for cervical cancer and other health conditions which commonly affect women in the village. Many women felt that they did not want to get the checks because their reproductive organs were taboo. Yet, through the free check program in 2015, 2016, and 2017, and awareness raising activities, women in the village have become more confident to get checked. This initiative is the result of cooperation between the Women's School with Ibnu Sina Hospital in

Gresik, the Gresik District Office of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, and other government agencies. This program became a turning point for women in Lastri's village to pay more attention to their health.

One aspect of herself which Lastri feels has changed since joining the Women's School is that she has gained confidence in public speaking. While she felt nervous and anxious sharing her opinions in forums, slowly, Lastri began to believe in herself and eventually became a speaker at a national event.

"When I was invited, I thought it was just gathering at the Village Hall. I was asked to introduce myself. For people who are not used to it and who are usually at home, being asked to introduce yourself alone is enough to tremble like you're terrified." (Lastri, Gresik research village, 22 February 2019)

Lastri's commitment to put into action the insights she has gained through the Women's School has resulted in her becoming increasingly confident to speak at events in the village, subdistrict and beyond. Lastri and her friends' efforts have resulted in the Women's School being included in Musrenbangdes (Village Development Consultative Meetings) and being annually allocated ten million rupiah (10,000 AUD) from the Village Fund. Lastri is now the Gresik District Coordinator of the Women's School. She hopes that she will always continue to put into action her commitment to other women, particularly poor women, and represent them so they can claim their rights and obtain equality.

Hj. Aminah

Head of the Village Pekka Union and Papadaan Group
North Hulu Sungai, South Kalimantan¹

Hj. Aminah who is currently fifty-one years old is an influential woman in her village in North Hulu Sungai, South Kalimantan. In her family village, Aminah is the Head of the Female-Headed Families (Pekka) union. As the head of the union, Aminah has many responsibilities, including leading meetings, holding events, compiling reports on group activities, and reporting to the PEKKA Foundation.²

Aminah, who has a middle school education, has also held other important positions in the village, as the head of the Farmers Group, the treasurer of the fishing group, and head of the Village-Owned Enterprise (BUMDes). Since being elected in 2018, Aminah has been the head of the Pekka Union at the district level.

Aminah's parents were farmers and both active in community life. Her father had been the village mosque's treasurer, while her mother was PKK treasurer. Her parents did not own their own land initially, so they rented land and divided their yield with the owners. After many years of tending this land, they were able to buy their own. They gave this one hectare of land as inheritance to their children, including Aminah.

Aminah was married in 1982 and has three children. Shortly after they married, Aminah's husband moved to Saudi Arabia where he sold hijabs on a tourist visa and lived with family members. In 1985, Aminah joined her husband in Saudi Arabia after he sent her money and they sold hijabs on the side of the road. One day the police were conducting a visa raid. Aminah was almost caught, but she successfully ran and left her products behind.

"I was selling, I had two bags of products. Then my friend said, don't be here, there's police, there's a raid. My friends ran to their own buildings. I was left behind, I didn't run. Then they came. They said, 'we are arresting you.' I was scared. I said, 'I am poor and my child is young.' They said, 'we don't care about you, we will arrest you.' I was caught. But I let go of the bags and ran. I was chased but he didn't run fast, and I ran so fast to a building. That's what happened." (Hj. Aminah, North Hulu Sungai research village 15 July 2019)³

After working in Saudi Arabia for four and a half years, Aminah and her husband returned to Indonesia and tended their ricefields. They did not have a lot of money from their time in Saudi Arabia and were only able to buy a motorbike and pay workers to tend the ricefields. For many years, they lived a simple life managing the ricefields her parents owned. When her husband died in 2007, Aminah experienced financial difficulties and grieved the loss of her closest confidant. Her youngest child was in sixth grade of Islamic primary school and her second child was at university. Despite financial challenges, she continued to prioritise her children's education.

"I cried a lot, cried and wasn't heard by anyone. Oh God, I was sad. I only cried when I prayed. I asked to be protected, asked for good health, that's all. I asked for good fortune. My child was only in year 6 of

¹ **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.

² PEKKA refers to the organisation whereas Pekka refers to the grassroots organising of women lead by village women.

³ ³ Hj. stands for "Hajjah" and is the title for a woman who has performed the *hajj* to Mekka.

madrasah, and however it would happen I was sure that God is the Greatest Giver. In the end my children finished school. It was my dream that my children would have better education than both their parents.” (Hj. Aminah, North Hulu Sungai research village, 15 July 2019)

One time, Aminah did not have enough money to pay for her children’s transport to school. But, while she was unsure how she would pay for it, someone gave her 20,000 rupiah (2 AUD) as *zakat*.⁴ Aminah used this money frugally. Likewise, when she received the season’s harvest, she saved to buy ricefields. Aminah bought a twelve “bird” sized ricefield, which equates to half a hectare, and in 2017 bought another four and a half “birds” of land for thirty-nine million rupiah (3,900 AUD). Aminah’s commitment to saving and a frugal lifestyle enabled her to buy land and raise her children. Her first child now works as a trader an hour away in Barabai district after finishing middle school, while the second is the Head of Finance in the village, and her youngest child is currently studying at university in Banjarmasin.

At the beginning of 2011, Aminah began to be involved with the Pekka group. She was initially invited by her cousin who is the wife of the Village Head to attend an information event run by the PEKKA Foundation. Aminah as the head of her family and has served as treasurer for the Posyandu and PKK, Aminah was regarded as a suitable candidate to join the union. After the establishment of the village’s Pekka union, the group was not immediately accepted by the local community, even when they went to the village meeting. As Aminah explains:

“Women before were not active and not included and were even chased away: ‘what are women doing here, go home.’” (Hj. Aminah, North Hulu Sungai research village 15 July 2019)

As the leader of the Pekka group since its formation, Aminah has played an integral role in its expansion. Her ability to write and do mathematics made her a very popular candidate for group leader, especially as the majority of the group’s members were much older than her and did not have the capacity to manage an organisation. Even though Aminah had both the ability and personality to become a leader, she felt shocked when she was elected as the group’s head.

“When I was chosen I was shocked. I still have a lot to learn and I’m not the most capable leader. I have the most to learn. I don’t know why I was chosen.” (Hj. Aminah, North Hulu Sungai, 15 July 2019)

Aminah and other group members tried to convince village women that joining the group would personally benefit them. For instance, by joining the group, women could be involved in savings and loan groups and training sessions. During these recruitment attempts, Aminah was often mocked by other women. Another challenge Aminah and her deputy faced was that they had to pay for catering for all group meetings, as many group members expected to be given material benefit and food.

“There were those who mocked us and it was hard to recruit women. There were people who we told to come and that there would be food, and they said ‘will there be money’ I said to the community, at nearly every event you can meet with the wife of the Village Head.” (Hj. Aminah, North Hulu Sungai research village, 15 July 2019)

During the leadership of Ahmad as Village Head, the village government supported the group. For instance, he invited villagers to join with Pekka and bought drums for the women’s group. Even though women were not initially invited to village meetings, Pekka members continued to attend despite being not confident to express their opinions yet.

⁴ *Zakat* is a form of Islamic alms-giving and religious obligation.

“At the beginning we were embarrassed, we hadn’t been invited but we went to every village meeting, particularly Musrenbangdes. Sometimes when a man drove past us we asked ‘where are you going?’ He would say there was a meetings. ‘What meeting?’, ‘a village meeting, gathering there.’ I grabbed a scarf and went there and invited other women.” (Hj, Aminah, North Hulu Sungai research village)

In 2015, Aminah took part in a leadership training program in Jakarta for six days run by the Pekka Foundation. Aminah was the only representative from her village. This training was highly beneficial and increased her understanding of social issues, as well as widening her friendship networks. After participating, she presented the results of the workshop at a union meeting.

As head of the Pekka union, Aminah has experienced a variety of challenges. At the beginning, Aminah felt scared when she met government office officials. After Aminah became comfortable being accompanied by a field staff member to meet with the government staff, she gradually became more confident.

Under Aminah’s leadership, there was one event which made her heart feel heavy. One member of the group declared that left over funds from the group’s cooperative were *haram* (sinful) while the group was in session. In response to this accusation, Aminah explained that the cooperative’s structure ensured that profit was shared between its members.

“One of my members said it was haram. My heart was pounding. I was shocked that she called it haram. Even though we were trying to have a halal [honourable] business. Suddenly, a friend said it was haram and it made me emotional.” (Hj. Aminah, North Hulu Sungai research village, 15 July 2019)

Another challenge Aminah faced with the Pekka group was when women’s proposals were rejected by the village government. At a village meeting, Pekka members had proposed to build a Pekka centre. However, this proposal was rejected because the community thought that constructing a road was a more pressing priority. Later, the Pekka Union, through Aminah as their representative, proposed the purchase of cabinets and a computer for Pekka from the village budget (APBDes). However, once again their proposal was not accepted, this time because they were told that they required an office before Pekka could buy items.

Despite these many challenges, Aminah thinks of the Pekka group like her own child and feels she cannot leave the group. Her younger brothers have invited her to live in another subdistrict, which is around an hour’s drive from her village, but:

“[Being in Pekka], it’s like having a child. It feels like my own child. So, when my brother asks me to move to the city, I say: ‘If only I didn’t have to move, I still care for [Pekka] members. I feel sad about leaving [my Pekka group]. But my brother wants me to move so I don’t have to work in the rice fields anymore.” (Hj. Aminah, North Hulu Sungai research village, 15 July 2019)

Aminah was also a central figure in the formation of the Village Enterprise (BUMDes) with the support of the Village Head who selected her to attend training at the district and in Jakarta.

“I was invited to Jakarta for a training and I heard about the BUMDes, and now there is the Village Regulation. When I was at the training at the district, on the second and final day ... I was at the front and I said, how about we establish a BUMDes in our village, how about if we had a village regulation.” (Hj. Aminah, North Hulu Sungai Research Village, 15 July 2019)

After gaining an understanding about the Village Enterprise (BUMDes), Aminah and other Pekka members advocated for a Village Regulation on a Village Enterprise of fish farming and stock raising. The Village

Regulation was drafted in a village meeting which included Pekka members, the Neighbourhood Head,⁵ the Village Consultative Council and village officials under Aminah's leadership.

"They said create the group first, so we did. Then we made the Village Regulation. It was 100% from Pekka." (Hj. Aminah, North Hulu Sungai research village, 15 July 2019)

Aminah's active role in her community can be seen through her many positions in organisations. At the same time as being a leader in Pekka and the BUMDes, she also held leadership positions as the head of the Farmers Group, a Posyandu cadre and the treasurer of a Fish Farming Group established by a Fisheries Field Officer. Aminah's Fish Farming Group also has a savings and loans group and aims to develop river fish farming, in line with the aims of the BUMDes to develop the village's fish farming industry.

Aminah is also active in village religious life and has played a large role in establishing an Islamic learning forum (*majelis taklim*) which takes place in Aminah's parents' house which she made available for the forum. At the *majelis taklim*, she takes turns leading prayers and Qur'an recitation. Aminah has also played a significant role as a drummer in a traditional *mahdihin* music group with other Pekka members. This group has performed at events on the sub-district, district, and national stages. At the Musrenbangdes in 2017, the *mahdihin* group successfully proposed an allocation of funds from the village budget to service and purchase more musical instruments which they hope will enable them to perform more, and with pride.

"We already had instruments, but they weren't complete. So, at the Musrenbang we proposed to complete the set. Finally, it is complete." (Hj. Aminah, North Hulu Sungai research village, 15 July 2019)

Hj. Aminah's leadership in these many organisations demonstrates how she has experienced significant growth after taking part in PEKKA training and leading the village Pekka union. Now, female heads of families are empowered by new skills, strong networks, and economic resources, and Aminah is one of the most active women in the village.

Aminah hopes that women can achieve equality with men and can be guaranteed their political and economic rights. To continue to develop the village's economy, Aminah will continue to work to establish the BUMDes through the fishing industry and other sectors.

⁵ Rukun Tetangga, the lowest level of government

Hj. Farah

Head of the Setia Kawan Pekka Group
North Hulu Sungai, South Kalimantan¹

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)²

Farah joined the Pekka union in 2011 after being invited by her friend Aminah.³ 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)

¹ **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.

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

³ 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.

Laila

Head of Women's School Group

Pangkajene and Islands, South Sulawesi⁴

Thirty-year-old Laila is an empowered woman leader in her village in the Pangkajene and Islands district who heads one of the Island Women's School groups. In 2016, following strong advocacy from the Women's School, the government officially recognised Laila as a fisherwoman, which means she is entitled to the same services and protections as her male counterparts.

Laila lives with her mother, as her father died in 1999. After finishing primary school, Laila became the family's primary wage earner after her older sibling got married. Laila helped her uncle work as a fisherman from an early age. However, as the income she earned was not enough to support herself and her mother, Laila decided to use her father's small fishing boat, known as a *bala-bala*, and fish herself. Everyday Laila crabs and farms seaweed. Seaweed farming has been a new venture for Laila for the past four years. From crabbing, Laila can earn one hundred thousand rupiah per kilo (10 AUD) depending on the market; as the market is currently unpredictable, sometimes she can only earn about sixty thousand rupiah for two kilograms. Laila sells her catch to an agent, called a *punggawa*, who then sells it in another region.

"At the start I went with my uncle. I learned from him, then I had my own punt [sampan] and I started to work by myself. I used the punt to go out on the sea near the mainland. I nearly drowned with that punt. A big wave came and struck the boat which sunk. I screamed but there was no one around me. Luckily there was my uncle and man who saw me from afar and they came ... After a while I could work for myself and I was confident to leave my uncle." (Laila, Pangkajene and Islands research village, 25 February 2019)

As Laila started fishing and working when she was small, she was not taught domestic tasks. When Laila came of age, she replaced her father and supported the family by fishing because she had the capacity and skill to work as a fisherwoman and to cultivate seaweed.

"When I am at home, I don't cook. Only my mum cooks. My work is at sea. I only work in the kitchen if my mum is out. Mum cooks and my aunt cleans the house and I am out at sea all the time. All the time. I eat as soon as I get home." (Laila, Pangkajene and Islands research village, 25 February 2019)

Laila was first invited to join Women's School activities in 2014 by her niece. She initially wanted to join as she thought she could get help to buy a boat to support her profession.

"We were invited to a meeting. Then we were told to draw a picture of the island, and I didn't know how to draw the island when I was told. Then I thought hopefully here I can broaden my thinking and complain about why I have never received financial assistance. I wanted to join to try. I wanted to leave my comfort zone. Maybe this was the only path I needed to take. Because before I wasn't confident to tell my story, not to the Village Head and I was even scared to talk with the Hamlet Head, scared to be blamed and that they would be angry. I was scared, really scared." (Laila, Pangkajene and Islands research village, 25 February 2019)

⁴ **Authors:** Ulya Niami Efrina Jamson and Hening Wikan Sawiji. **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.

After the initial meeting, Laila began to be active in the Women's School. She keenly participated in training and discussion sessions. In large and formal forums, Laila shared her life story of being a fisherwoman and the challenges she faced. At the time, the Women's School met three times a month in the middle of the day or afternoon as not to disrupt her work. As she was so active and had many leadership traits, Laila became the head of the Women's School in her village – the Rakkang Jaya Women's School – which has approximately 40 members.

Under Laila's leadership, the School regularly holds meetings and discussions. At these events, members learned from YKPM (Foundation for Community Studies and Empowerment⁵) facilitators about gender justice. These meetings usually took place at the house of the Women's School coordinator on another island. To get there, Laila used transport money from the savings and loan group's joint funds to pay for a boat ride. These discussions expanded Laila's skills and built her critical awareness about rights which encouraged her to be more confident in voicing her opinion in public.

"Before the Women's School, I wasn't confident. If I went out of my house and saw someone wearing an official uniform walking on the pier, I hid. I was scared, scared to say something, scared to be wrong. After one year of going to the Women's School, my courage emerged. I realised that I have a place here, I have rights here. I already knew that I had rights here, but I didn't fully comprehend who should fulfil my rights, who would we talk to about our rights? We met [at the Women's School] three times a month and discussed materials about gender. It broadened our perspective. Before, I didn't have the courage at all to speak in front of men, I wasn't confident, I didn't have the courage. But since I became a member of the Women's School, thank God, we have made ourselves confident to convey what we think." (Laila, Pangkajene and Islands research village, 25 February 2019)

Since 2015, Laila has served as a Neighbourhood Head (Ketua Rukun Tetangga – RT) on her island. Laila was selected by the Village Head and continued by the subsequently elected Village Head. Laila agreed to take on this role after being convinced that she should take this opportunity to have formal responsibility, especially after Laila had learned about women's leadership in Women's School materials.

This new position, however, was not without challenges. The Hamlet Head, who is related to Laila, did not accept her appointment because women are often considered unsuitable to hold a leadership role. These relationships gradually improved because they recognised that Laila was good at performing her duties and coordinating with others.

"Before I became Neighbourhood Head, the Hamlet Head was unsure about my appointment but Pak Bahrudin [The Village Head] and Women's School members said why are you underestimating her? She hasn't done anything yet so why are you doubting her? See first, if you're not happy with my work then I'll stop. After a year the Hamlet Head seemed satisfied that my work was good, which I was pleased with." (Laila, Pangkajene and Islands research village, 1 March 2019)

Laila felt that she had a moral responsibility to apply the knowledge she had learned at the school. She was increasingly concerned about women's issues and needs in her local area. Laila identified that women really needed water tanks, public bathrooms, and electricity. Water tanks were important because residents often had difficulty accessing clean water, particularly in dry season. Without tanks, women had to search to find water for the household every day, a task made harder if the family boat was taken by men for fishing meaning that the women could not travel to purchase water. As such, many women had no other option than to use sea water.

⁵ Yayasan Kajian dan Pemberdayaan Masyarakat.

“Water tanks were needed so that women don’t have to think about where to get clean water, especially in dry season there isn’t any water, and if our children go to the other island to get water, that makes it harder for women. So, if we had water tanks we wouldn’t have this difficulty. It’s clear that water issues are women’s issues, because men go to sea early in the morning. If kids are willing, they can go with their dad to other islands and get water, but if they can’t it gets hard and the water can run out.” (Laila, Pangkajene and Islands research village, 1 March 2019)

At the 2017 village Musrenbang, Laila proposed that twenty-five water tanks be purchased. Her island ended up receiving fifteen as other islands also made the same proposal. The next year, Laila again suggested that 20 water tanks be purchased.

Another key need for women in Laila’s community was public toilets, as many residents do not have toilets in their houses. Because of this, many women use the sea to wash and defecate, even at night. The construction of three public toilets means that women no longer have to go to beach in the pitch black of night. Laila and other Women’s School members proposed their construction at the village’s Musrenbang.

“Before the village Musrenbang, we had a hamlet Musrenbang first and invited community members to attend. We asked what they needed. [We said] even if they ask you later, answer like this because we know what the Village Head is like.” (Laila, Pangkajene and Islands research village, 25 February 2019)

Solar power infrastructure to supply the island with electricity was another priority for women in the village. With access to electricity, women could have adequate rest and finish housework at night. Advocacy for solar panels began with discussions at the Women’s School. Members then proposed the purchasing of solar panels to the Village Head on a neighbouring island, both through informal lobbying and at Musrenbangdes. As a Women’s School representative, Laila also conveyed the importance of solar panels directly to the Pangkep District Head who visited her island during his re-election campaign in 2015. Eventually, this advocacy was successful and solar panels were installed on the island in 2017.

Laila, who has inspired many other women, then had the opportunity to talk about challenges she has faced to the District Head during a women’s leadership training event in Makassar. A few months later, Laila received assistance from KAPAL Perempuan which enabled her to buy her own fishing boats. However, despite the group’s advocacy, Laila did not have a fishing licence or insurance. In 2016, when the Marine and Fishing Office was gathering data at the Head of the Hamlet’s house, Laila’s name was put on the list of fishermen and women. One month later her licence was issued and five months later she received insurance. These documents are important steps toward fisherwomen on this island having their rights fulfilled.

After the 2016 Village Head election, the Hamlet Head retained his position as he was friend of the successful candidate. However, as the new Village Head did not like the Women’s School as he regarded it as supporting his political rival in the village election, he sought to remove Laila as a Neighbourhood Head. Nevertheless, because of the strong relationship Laila had forged with the Hamlet Head, he stood up for Laila and she retained her position.

“He said that I am easy to communicate with and that I’m not shy and that he feels fine asking me to help him to go to the Village Office, for instance, that he doesn’t feel reluctant to ask for my help. It’s also because I have my own boat, so if someone is sick, I can take them to the health post, it’s not hard for me, so I just do it.” (Laila, Pangkajene and Islands research village, 1 March 2019)

The challenges Laila has faced during her role as a female leader and Neighbourhood Head have been influenced by her involvement with the Women’s School. Her fellow islanders often blame her if they feel that

they do not receive a fair share of financial assistance from the village or district government. This made Laila feel like stepping down from her position in 2018, but she was supported by her School friends.

Laila is a resilient woman, who even though she is sometimes seen as stubborn, has worked hard since she was a child. Her journey is inspirational because she always wants to, as she said herself, “leave her comfort zone”. She has courageously claimed spaces and gained knowledge which has made her a prominent woman in her community. Laila will always strive for poor women through the Women’s School. She hopes that through this School women will educate themselves.

Julianti

Head of the Women's School Seaweed Farmers Group,
Pangkajene and Islands, South Sulawesi¹

Julianti, who is currently twenty-four years old, is Head of the Women's School Seaweed Farmers Group in a Pangkajene and Islands district village. Juli, as she is normally known, lives on one island with her husband and one-year-old son, while her parents and family live on another island which together forms one village. After she finished primary school, Juli's parents were initially reluctant to send their eldest child to another island for the first time to continue her education, but eventually allowed her to because Juli travelled with her school friends from their island. Juli's highest formal education was finishing the "B-package", which is equivalent to middle school, in 2014.

Every day, Juli prepares rope for longline seaweed farming, sews crab nets, and sells food. She also sells facial and beauty products and wallets which her younger sister makes. This work supplements her husband's income from fishing – he earns between thirty and one hundred thousand rupiah a day (3-10 AUD) – which is not enough for their daily needs, particularly after the birth of their son. As well as working outside the house for her family, Juli also does all the housework herself, including cooking, cleaning, and taking care of their child.

Juli's leadership skills were forged when she lived with her grandfather who was the Hamlet Head, skills she later developed with others, as Juli likes to meet and learn with other people. Unfortunately, Juli's strict upbringing and family's treatment of her as a girl limited her opportunities to join activities outside the house and to gain access to information about how governance worked in her community.

"In his day, my grandfather, who has already passed now, was the first Hamlet Head on the island. My intention was to continue his work. My motivation has been to continue to improve governance here like my grandfather [...] I really want to advance my island. But before I joined the Women's School, I was scared of people in uniform. I had the motivation, but I was scared. I thought that those who wore uniform would want to capture me if I spoke up. Until I graduated from primary school, I was so scared, if someone came, I hid." (Juli, Pangkajene and Islands research village, 25 February 2019)

This shows how Juli, like other women in the village, was not initially concerned about decision-making processes and the village government's work plan. The absence of women like Juli from these processes is exacerbated by the common fear women have of officials in uniform, like police officers. Juli explained that before the establishment of the Women's School, many men and government officials underestimated and did not believe women.

"[Women] don't go to the government. In the community women are treated as children who shouldn't be heard, but now at the School we are valued. Before we were excluded, if I had information about something no one would believe me, no one believed me when I said that we should be getting financial assistance. They didn't believe me." (Juli, Pangkajene and Islands research village, 25 February 2019)

This perception of the role of women in the community began to shift once the Women's School was established. Women were provided with critical-thinking training materials, including about women's role in

¹ **Authors:** Ulya Niami Efrina Jamson and Hening Wikan Sawiji. **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.

the public sphere and village decision making. Juli recalled that her younger sister had initially been invited to join the School when Intan, a staff member at the Foundation for Community Studies and Empowerment (YKPM), visited the island. When Juli heard that the School was going to be established, she immediately registered.

Juli joined the Women's School because of her strong commitment to keep learning; an unremitting energy which she had not been able to apply in a formal educational setting. After joining the school, Juli's prominence was demonstrated when she was elected as secretary and then group leader. She always enjoys discussions with friends from other islands which both enrich her knowledge and importantly extend her networks.

"I did not know anything about these four islands ... and now I do. I received lots of input from friends, and we could share [our experiences]. [I now have] many friends from other villages, we are close like family." (Juli, Pangkajene and Islands research village, 25 February 2019)

Juli learned about advocacy at the School, especially how to fight for the basic rights of villagers. She applied this knowledge to advocate for students and parents of a primary school in her village. In 2016, Juli found out that children were not regularly attending school. After hearing similar complaints from many mothers, Juli wrote to the school authorities to hold an open meeting about how teacher attendance was affecting how students learned. At the meeting, however, parents and guardians did not feel comfortable to convey their complaints because they feared the school principal who was well-known as being skilled in black magic.

"I sent a letter in 2016 and held a meeting between parents and guardians and teachers at the school. I spoke and then my plan was to hand over to the parents and then to the principal so he could ask questions. But even the students' parents were afraid to speak, so it looked like the meeting was only my initiative, because it was only me who wanted to speak. The wife of the Hamlet Head also sided with the Principal. ... So, when residents were asked [what the problem was], there was no story [to tell]. It was as if it was just me making it all up. When it was over, the Principal said to me 'come here, don't be careless. If you report [what's going on], I'll put a curse on you', and threatened me. Maybe people were afraid, because he is a Mandarese person and they're known as being good at black magic. After that happened I felt sick after our meeting ... I came home sick and was sick for a few months. My vagina was swollen, until it looked like a ping pong ball. After being treated by the doctor, I went to the traditional healer, and they said it was because of black magic." (Juli, Pangkajene and Islands research village, 25 February 2019)

The swelling only began to subside in 2018. While Juli was recovering at home from her illness, most of the people who visited asked her to quit the Women's School. They thought Juli's involvement in the school had caused her to become unwell. Juli, however, brushed off these fears and chose to continue to be involved in the Women's School.

"[I say] go for it anyway. Surrender to God for it is God who responds. When I got treated, maybe people thought 'oh this sick child will give up' but, but I didn't give up. The larger the challenge is, the more I like it. I am an island girl, big waves pass, they just pass." (Juli, Pangkajene and Islands research village, 25 February 2019)

Juli's involvement in the Women's School and close relationship with Intan, a staff member at YKPM, changed her perspective about women's role in private and public spheres. Now she thinks that men should also take on household responsibilities and understands that importance of women in village decision making, which should always be strived for.

Juli emphasises how Intan always helps her when she is advocating in the community to access services to which they are entitled and provides her with more personal support. This close relationship was forged as Juli attended every Women's School activity and confided her problems in Intan. For Juli, the most important part of their relationship is that Intan often accompanies and gives advice to Juli about village development and empowerment.

"I can ask anything which has happened, not just problems in the group, also if there's something I want to say, something I don't understand. I'll ask Intan. Also, about the Village Government, I've asked about the Village Fund, like how much there is. It's not just that either. I also confide about my family, I feel so close with her." (Juli, Pangkajene and Islands research village, 2 March 2019)

Juli's rapid learning journey to understand YKPM materials about gender justice fostered her self-belief to fight for equality for all women, starting in her own family. She became more aware of what should not happen in a healthy relationship, such as a husband giving excessive domestic tasks to his wife. Juli's critical thinking about these issues and her busy schedule of activities with the Women's School outside the village caused her relationship with her husband to drift. Juli's husband was uncomfortable that she often left him and their son at home. Since they had been dating, he had conveyed his disapproval of Juli's organisational activities, but she had not lessened her involvement.

One time, when Juli again insisted that she was not going to leave the Women's School, her husband became very angry and hit her. Before this, Juli had taken a year off from the Women's School to travel with her husband who got a job in Papua. But, after being hit by her husband, Juli took her son and left him, returning to her parents' house. She gave him an ultimatum that if he wanted them to continue their marriage, he could not prevent her attending events at the Women's School. Juli recalled that in that moment her response drew upon what she had learned at the School about the importance of valuing and respecting women's bodies and selves.

"From a critical gender perspective, we shouldn't judge others. If someone is disabled, they usually get teased, but after I understood materials from YKPM I realised that we shouldn't do this. There are lots of different types of violence – not just physical violence. I learned at a Women's School training session that violence also can include hurtful words and stories. I learned that violence isn't just hitting someone." (Juli, Pangkajene and Islands research village, 25 February 2019)

One way in which Juli has worked for her community has been through her instrumental role in advocacy for solar panels to provide the island with electricity. Juli explains that women on her island need clean water and electricity to carry out their work at home and outside, but that supply has not been adequate. Juli advocated for the purchasing of solar panels through the village Musrenbang and lobbied the Village Head in 2015 and 2016. Unfortunately, it proved impossible to install the solar panels as the island where Juli lives does not have enough available land. Nevertheless, home solar panels were distributed and now forty percent of residents have them. This has been very valuable for villagers, especially because it has meant that streets which beforehand were pitch black are now lit. For Juli, this successful advocacy was the result of the community and the village government working together.

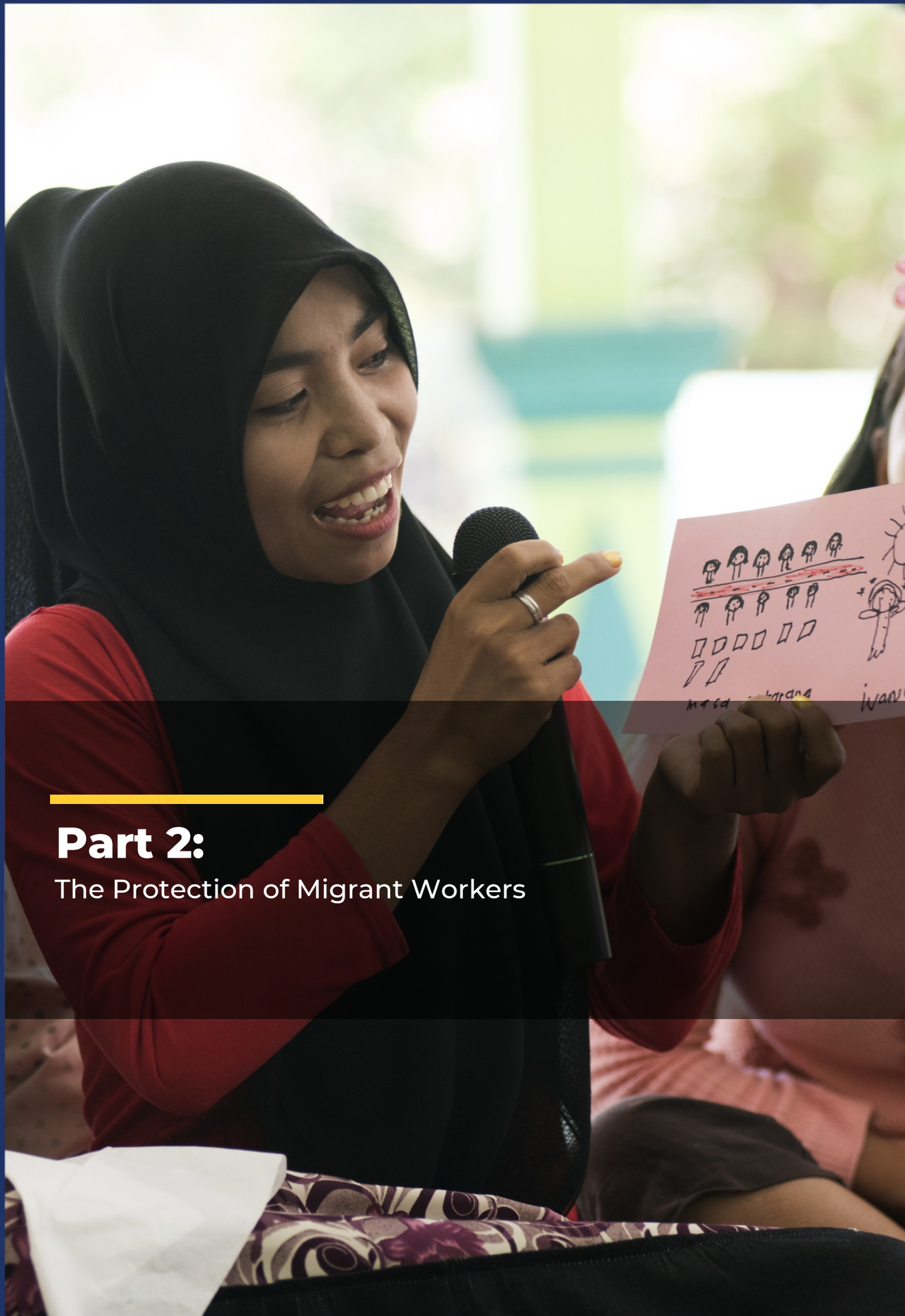
"We participate first. If the village has good leaders who want to talk to and help the community and women's and men's groups... In any case the important thing is the leader. If the leader wants to talk to the community, if there is cooperation between the government and the community, then assistance will meet its targets." (Juli, Pangkajene and Islands research village, 25 February 2019)

The largest challenge which Juli is currently facing is that she and her Women's School friends can no longer access allocations from the Village Fund. This shift is because of the influence of patronage in local politics and

events which occurred after the 2016 village election. The mother-in-law of the new Village Head marginalised the Women's School from decision-making processes like Musrenbang, because they were regarded as having supported an opposition candidate.

"I really want to. We need things but I don't know who to ask. If we are invited to Musrenbang we can say what the island needs. After Pak Andi's term finished, we didn't have this [opportunity] anymore. A while ago I asked the Hamlet Head, "what about the hamlet meeting?" He said, "we can, but I don't know when the village meeting will be, so how would I know when the hamlet meeting is? The Women's School will keep going it can be beneficial to so many more women who are yet to experience it. It can make so many more women go from not understanding to understanding." (Juli, Pangkajene and Islands research village, 2 March 2019)

Juli hopes that the Women's School program can continue in her village and that more women can become members and experience the changes and benefits like she has, particularly to have the confidence to speak in public and speak out for political and social rights. As a prominent member of the Island Women's School, Juli is currently being trained by YKPM to follow in Intan's footsteps as a field staff member to focus on empowerment in other areas.



Part 2:

The Protection of Migrant Workers

Gita

Chairperson of DESBUMI

Central Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara¹

Twenty-seven-year-old Gita is Head of Villages that Care for Migrant Workers (DESBUMI) in a village in Central Lombok. She is a young graduate who chose to apply the knowledge and experience she gained through higher education to empower her local community, rather than finding a job in a major city. After growing up in this Central Lombok village, she studied chemistry for four years at the Indonesian Education University in Bandung with a scholarship from the West Nusa Tenggara provincial government.

After graduating in 2011, Gita returned to the village and was involved in the National Program for Community Empowerment in 2013. This opportunity arose both because of Gita's expertise as an educated young woman and because of her strong social capital. Gita's family are members of the local nobility, and she was the niece of the Village Head at the time. In Central Lombok, being associated with the local nobility conveys significant social capital for those who want to participate in village social and political life.

Gita's involvement in women's empowerment continued when the Panca Karsa Association Mataram (PPK) entered the village to start their program to protect migrant workers in 2014. As she was already working for the National Program for Community Empowerment, Gita was invited by PPK fieldworkers to collect data on villagers' mobility.

"After we had the data, then we were told to start working in the village, we became cadres and held activities. After we got organised then we started bringing the community together." (Gita, Central Lombok research village, 10 July 2019)

Gita was the first person to conduct the migration survey, together with a village office staff member. The survey required patience and resilience as they visited each migrant workers' family one by one to ask about their experiences of departure, the destination country, and duration of their contract. The lack of data about who had worked as a migrant worker also meant that Gita had to be creative and ask survey respondents who else in their area she should record as migrant workers.

To complete the survey, Gita put into practice her good communication skills so that residents would feel comfortable sharing their personal information. Gita's standing and social capital assisted her in gaining their trust.

"It was different from working with the National Program of Community Empowerment which had cadres to help, so it wasn't us directly who were inviting people [to join], like if we held a training session for pregnant women, we just had to give the invitations to the cadres from each hamlet and it was done, then we would wait at the Village Office. With DESBUMI, we go door to door." (Gita, Central Lombok research village, 10 July 2019)

¹ **Authors:** Mustaghfiroh Rahayu 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.

The migration data which Gita and her colleagues gathered became the basis of PPK to campaign for the creation of DESBUMI to the village government. DESBUMI is a village-level initiative program created by Migrant CARE to advocate for and support migrant workers and their families. After its formation, Gita and her colleagues promoted the importance of safe migration and document processing services. These initiatives went well because of Gita's leadership and dedication to sharing information and seeking out villagers' experiences of migration.

"We promoted the importance of safe migration in each hamlet first. We made a timetable for the 11 hamlets that we started with and then we shared the timetable. It had on it, on this day we will go to these hamlets, and then we all went there and asked the Hamlet Head for help. We knew who to give the invitations to from our own networks, the survey and the Village Head. If we hadn't given out enough invitations, then we would ask the Hamlet Head." (Gita, Central Lombok research village, 10 July 2019)

Being the leader of DESBUMI required Gita to be a very capable public speaker. Although she had been trained as a teacher, Gita felt that speaking to a group of adults needed different skills.

"I had never been taught about public speaking before, so before I spoke we prepared what I needed to say and sometimes I practiced too. It's okay to present and read ... to read it first if you haven't memorised it yet. Slowly we learned how to communicate." (Gita, Central Lombok research village, 10 July 2019)

Apart from sharpening her communication skills, Gita also widened her knowledge through the DESBUMI program, particularly through paralegal and gender training. She learned how to gather evidence of workers' rights violations, experiences of violence, and illegal migration agents which DESBUMI monitored. As the Chairperson of DESBUMI, Gita often met with women who experienced difficulties while they were working overseas, especially individuals whose rights had been violated. These meetings allowed Gita to put into practice her social skills and what she had learned about how to support victims of mistreatment.

Gita's role with DESBUMI also enabled her to meet with women from different areas at regional and national events. By sharing her experiences and listening to women from other islands, Gita further extended her knowledge.

Under Gita's leadership, DESBUMI made rapid progress. Data on migration began to be recorded systematically, and documents required to work overseas were processed with transparency. Moreover, villagers no longer kept their migrant work secret. This progress reached its peak in 2014, when after lobbying and assistance from Migrant CARE and PPK, the village government issued a Village Regulation on the Protection of Migrant Workers. This Village Regulation stipulated that all departing migrant workers must report to the Village Office and provide complete documentation, including providing copies of their passport and correctly processed visa. Thus, Gita and her DESBUMI cadre colleagues' work to gather data and monitor migrant workers was officially integrated into village government.

The most significant change which Gita experienced since becoming involved with DESBUMI is that she has become more aware of social issues in her local area. Before becoming the leader of DESBUMI, Gita was not aware of the issues faced by migrant workers in her village, such as the problem of illegal agents, wages, and experiences of violence. DESBUMI gave her an opportunity to gain knowledge and to broaden her sense of obligation to helping her community. The training and knowledge Gita learned with DESBUMI has made her a trusted person to confide in and share information about safe migration.

“The first thing [which has changed] is that I know more about migrant labour. At the beginning I didn’t know anything at all about what the departure process is like. We didn’t think that it was a social problem, I rarely did before. At university I wasn’t active in student organisations, because students have limited time, so they have to use it well. The second thing [which has changed] is that I know more about my own community. So now we understand ‘it turns out the village is like this’, before we only knew what was happening around our own house, but now we understand.” (Gita, Central Lombok research village, 10 July 2019)

In 2016, Gita decided to marry a man who her family chose. Getting married did not lessen Gita’s involvement and prioritisation of her work with DESBUMI, because her husband fully supported her. Even when she was pregnant, she carried out all her tasks. In 2017, Gita made a decision which would significantly change her life – she registered in the Frontline Teachers Program and was accepted to teach in Southwest Sumba.² Gita, and her child in tow, now teaches and trains the local community about nutrition. While far from home, Gita applies the knowledge and organisational expertise, particularly her communication and advocacy skills.

“At the start I didn’t know what the environment was like there. I had imagined it and my friends who left before I did told me about it. From Lombok there were 13 of us, and I went last because I had recently given birth. My husband and mother-in-law came too, and my husband gave up his job here.” (Gita, Central Lombok research village, 10 July 2019)

Now, Gita symbolically is still the Chairperson of DESBUMI, but another person carries out the day-to-day management of the group. While she is no longer directly in charge, Gita hopes that DESBUMI will continue its work to accompany, educate and monitor migrant workers. A change in village leadership has produced challenges for DESBUMI cadres. However, she is confident that the cadres who are experienced in dealing with government officials will continue to advocate for regulation, policy, and awareness about safe migration. Her work with DESBUMI has made Gita incredibly caring towards other people. The knowledge and skills she gained through study have given her the tools to eliminate the issues facing migrant workers from her village.

² Frontline Teachers is an initiative of the Ministry of Education which aims to increase the quality of education in remote areas of the archipelago.

Hj. Nisa

Head of the La Tansa Migrant Worker Observer Group

Central Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara¹

Hj. Nisa is the head of the La Tansa Migrant Worker Observer group. Nisa has her own experience as an ex-migrant worker who was employed in Saudi Arabia. She left for Saudi Arabia for the first time in 2005, when her first child was four years old. This first contract was for two years in Riyadh. Nisa's primary task was to take care of two children who, when she arrived, were four years old and six months old. After finishing this contract, Nisa returned home to Lombok for a year and then departed again with her husband for four years. While she had requested to return home after this contract finished, her employer promised to pay for Nisa to go on the *hajj* pilgrimage if she committed to another contract. To realise her dream of completing the *hajj*, she persisted and agreed to a second contract. Nisa went on *hajj* in 2012 and now uses the title "Hajjah" or "Hj". In March 2013, she decided to return to Lombok permanently and not work as a migrant worker again.

While she was working in Saudi Arabia, Nisa thought that her employer was treating her unfairly. In Saudi households there are often multiple house assistants charged with their own specific tasks. These workers come from a variety of countries, including Sri Lanka, Nepal, Pakistan and the Philippines. In Nisa's experience, each worker was treated and paid differently, and other domestic workers were able to choose their own tasks, such as cleaning or taking care of young and old family members. Conversely, Nisa was paid less and her work constantly changed. This made her wonder about her position in the household and her rights. Once, she asked her employer why they were treating others differently. Their response implied that they assumed that migrant workers from Indonesia, like Nisa, only deserved a low wage.

"But I asked my employer, why is that so? [They said] 'We don't get our own workers, we pay for them. We pay a lot for Indonesian domestic workers.' I got the impression that we had already been paid for, so I was tied to them and however they treated me I had to obey them. Sometimes if they didn't want to, they would tell me to look after their parents, only occasionally they cooked. [Then I said], I don't want to do just this. If you don't change this, I'll go home.' And, in the end, I went home." (Hj. Nisa, Central Lombok research village, 8 July 2019)

This experience made Hj. Nisa decide to return to Lombok and work in her village. But this decision made her Nisa feel uncertain about how she would support her family in the future, a feeling shared by many of her friends who also used be migrant workers.

"Even though I had already been to Saudi Arabia and earnt a lot of money and bought a motorbike and a house, in the end it went back to how it was before. Back to the start."² In the end the same economic problems came back." (Hj. Nisa, Central Lombok research village, 8 July 2019)

With the help of cadres who are involved in DESBUMI, a Migrant CARE initiative at the village-level to support migrant workers and their families, Nisa and thirty other former women migrant workers established the Migrant Worker Observer Group La Tansa.³ Nisa suggested this name to the group because she remembered that her employer in Saudi Arabia often said '*la tansa*' which means 'don't forget'. This group was established

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² Nisa used the popular phrase "back to the laptop" which means "back to basics" or "back to the start". This phrase was popularised by the host of the television show *Empat Mata*, Tukul Arwana.

³ See also the story of Gita, the Chairperson of DESBUMI, in this Central Lombok village.

primarily so that former women migrant workers and their families could establish livelihoods from activities like crafts and making traditional cakes.

“It was to change our financial situation. Because it is hard here. At the time, I didn’t know how to make these things. So that [migrant work] was my only option to change my difficult financial situation here.” (Hj. Nisa, Central Lombok research village, 8 July 2019)

The group gathered their initial funds for activities through a savings and loans group. Each member had to donate ten thousand rupiah (1 AUD) at the start, and then five thousand a month at meetings. This money was then used as capital for member’s businesses, on a rotating basis. These economic activities took place in groups of four or five people. In La Tansa, there are several groups, such as those who make puddings and biscuits, weaving, and process fish; although the cake and cracker making groups developed the quickest. All groups help each other when they receive orders.

“This group just made us practice. For instance, now we have this group and lots of our friends make cakes. If there is an order and I can’t make it, I can ask another member.” (Hj. Nisa, Central Lombok research village, 8 July 2019)

Hj. Nisa enthusiastically takes part in the La Tansa group’s activities. The savings she and her husband had earned in Saudi Arabia paid for land, building their house, and provided the capital for their chicken farm, but then ran out. These group activities can support her family’s daily needs. Daily orders of puddings for celebrations and gifts, as well as the income from chicken farming provide her with additional sources of income.

Discussions between women in the group also have led to innovative ways of marketing their products. In addition to selling them in conventional ways, now Nisa also takes orders through Facebook and WhatsApp. All of La Tansa’s members try to use their social media accounts to maximise their advertising.

“Yes, I take orders on WhatsApp too, people from outside the village also order during Ramadan and Eid-al-Fitr, we can get a lot of orders then. I also sew if there are orders. During the day, I make snacks and at night I sew. Now I also sew school uniforms.” (Hj. Nisa, Central Lombok research village, 8 July 2019)

Hj. Nisa is now economically independent because her pudding and cake catering company receives a lot of orders. After she returned home from Saudi Arabia, she was blessed with a daughter who is now four-years-old. Everything she has now means that Nisa no longer wants to work overseas. There is one reason in particular why she is certain that she does not want to go overseas again: her difficult relationship with her first child. She does not want her second child to be left behind if her mother worked far from the village.

“Yes, I am scared, my daughter is so young. That’s why I don’t want to go back. Now I only want to make a living here. That’s what makes me sad, I have to hear from other people what my own child wants. Sometimes I am jealous when I see my neighbour with their child. That’s why my little girl can’t go far from me. That’s why I stopped. Even though he [her eldest child] is close with his grandma, I don’t have that. I sometimes cry, why doesn’t my child want to be close to me.” (Hj. Nisa, Central Lombok research village, 8 July 2019)

As well as developing their livelihood skills, Hj. Nisa and other La Tansa members often discuss and share their experiences of being women migrant workers. These sharing sessions take place once a month. Sharing these experiences means that people, especially women, who want to work overseas get to know each other and become aware of how to safely engage in migrant work.

“For those who leave, come home, or have problems, we get told. Our members give information to their neighbours, for instance, if someone wants to go to Saudi Arabia, they will tell them here is safer and that all requirements need to be complete, so don’t fake them [the documents].” (Hj. Nisa, Central Lombok research village, 8 July 2019)

Nisa and her friends in the women’s group have become village ‘ambassadors’, who inform others about the dangers of working overseas without complete and valid documents. Nisa admits that when she left for Saudi Arabia, she did not know anything about official processes. While she went there twice, she did not know who to contact if she experienced any problems. It was only after joining the organisation and advocating for migrant workers that she realised all of the shortcomings and mistakes in her own experience as a migrant worker.

La Tansa now represents the voices of people in the village, especially women, who are currently working overseas. Through the organisation, Nisa hopes she can help the DESBUMI assist migrant workers who experience injustice, violence and other migration problems. Nisa and other La Tansa members report all information they get about villagers overseas to DESBUMI who then offer assistance.

“In the end we let the cadres know and they are the ones who take the next step. We just give them the information we have and then they act. We speak and listen to the community, to our neighbours. If someone comes home with and talks about a problem, we let the group know and then our friends the cadres will take it from there.” (Hj. Nisa, Central Lombok research village, 8 July 2019)

As an association in partnership with DESBUMI, Panca Karsa and Migrant CARE, La Tansa is often invited to meetings with other organisations who focus on migrant workers issues, at the local, regional, and even national levels. At the local level, Hj. Nisa played a role in the allocation of village funds (from the Village Budget) to DESBUMI, and advocating for the District Regulation on the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers from Central Lombok. Nisa has been invited to national forums, but as her daughter is still young she chose to be represented by another La Tansa member. Nisa is also active in other community work as a Posyandu cadre and with the Family Planning Village project.

Nisa and other women have benefited in many ways since they established La Tansa. They have economically empowered themselves by creating livelihood opportunities which not only help fulfil their everyday needs, but also strengthen the financial situation of many families in their village. By attending training sessions, Nisa deepened her understanding of how to migrate safely. Through La Tansa, Nisa shares this knowledge to the wider community who intend on becoming migrant workers and those who are currently overseas. Nisa’s knowledge and leadership in La Tansa has also enabled her to participate in decision-making forums at the village level and beyond.

Before Nisa’s active community spirit was only known by her neighbours, but now village officials value her suggestions and input. Nisa and other women from La Tansa have requested that the Village Head provide space to promote their products in the Village Hall. She hopes that the village government will always support the group’s activities so that women in her village gain confidence and financial stability.



Part 3:

Improving Working Conditions

Mia

Secretary of the Regional Representative Council, Prosperous Homeworkers Union
Deli Serdang, North Sumatra¹

Mia is a woman homemaker who has been influential in the establishment of a homeworkers' union in Deli Serdang. Mia, who is in her forties, is currently the secretary of the Regional Representative Council of the Prosperous Homeworkers Union (Serikat Pekerja Rumahan SPR – Sejahtera). She was born and grew up in Serdang Bedagai district where she began working as a homemaker in middle school. At that time, Mia shucked shellfish and fastened sandal straps, amongst other tasks, for a company. In 1990, Mia moved to this village and married her husband in 1990.

Mia's husband used to work as a *becak* driver. To supplement her husband's wage, Mia weaves wire grills at home. While she does not earn a lot, her wages pay their children's school fees. In 2002, for instance, Mia earned only three hundred thousand rupiah (30 AUD) a month.

Mia's family is very active in labour organisations. Her husband, who currently works as a loading foreman at a factory, is active in the All-Indonesian Employee Union (SPSI), and their daughter has also been involved in SPR Sejahtera. This involvement in the worker's movement has provided them with significant knowledge of employment issues. But Mia, in particular, only started understanding her labour rights after she joined SPR Sejahtera. Previously she and other women homeworkers were not aware that they had rights as workers, and that corporations must be obliged to protect and educate them about the risks associated with weaving wire grills.

"We need the Draft District Regulation to gain work rights. This type of work uses sharp tools and you can hurt your hands. We are pursuing the Draft District Regulation to provide us with protection and a legal framework to guarantee our health and safety at work. Your hands can get stabbed or scratched. The risks are really high." (Mia, Deli Serdang research village, 8 November 2019)

Mia's wages do not take into consideration how risky her work is. Mia's hands are often injured because the weaver and wire she uses are potentially dangerous. Despite Mia's hard work, she only makes about five thousand rupiah (0.5 AUD) per bundle of wire and ten thousand for a larger sized grill. In a day, Mia can finish around two bundles, depending on the size of the wire.

Mia's life as a homemaker turned a corner when she met Diah, a BITRA staff member. Diah invited Mia to talk about being a homemaker and through this discussion, Mia realised that the company she worked for did not adequately protect her rights. Mia's new awareness laid the foundation of her determination to deepen her knowledge about the world of industry by attending training sessions and seminars. Diah also invited Mia to be involved in the establishment of a homemaker group and join the Prosperous Homeworkers Union. Mia was initially reluctant to join the union because of her responsibilities at work at home, but eventually joined in June 2014.

¹ **Author:** Devy Dhian Cahyati and Bellicia Angelica Tanvil. **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.

At the beginning, Mia's husband did not let Mia participate in union group activities or training sessions which were supported by BITRA. He was uncomfortable that BITRA's activities were generally held in hotels – places which some conservative groups deem unsuitable for women. Nevertheless, Mia attended these sessions and demonstrated the benefits of union membership to her husband. At every session, Mia learned new information about gender, work health and safety, law, and employment regulations. In addition, her practical skills were enhanced through training in sewing and cooking. Mia's persistence, perseverance, and the positive effects she was bringing home shifted her husband's point of view and eventually he fully supported her participation in the union.

"If something goes wrong [between us], he says 'but you've learned about gender,' he's always reminding me like that. I have to apply all that I have learned. Sometimes us women can go too far when we talk. Sometimes we raise our voices, when this happens, he reminds me and says something like, 'why are you doing this? You have already learned about gender.'" (Mia, Deli Serdang research village, 8 November 2019)

After she gained the full support of her husband, Mia became more active in the union and wire weavers' group. In fact, over time, Mia's membership was supported by everyone in her family. She also began to share the knowledge she was gaining from SPR about rights and work status to other women homeworkers. To do this, Mia took a personal approach and often visited homeworkers at their houses, before inviting them to come to a discussion session with other women at her house. Mia really cared about the women she invited to her house and, over a short period of time, those who had initially been unfamiliar with each other became closer with each other. On the fifth meeting, these women houseworkers formed their own workers' group.

"I think that the first time the eleven of us met we were still naïve and full of ourselves. And it was the same the second time we met. As time went by, we became closer and closer with each other. In the second meeting we gathered data. In the third meeting we already wanted to start it. Our fifth meeting was after the Members Conference. The point is that we were visiting each other back and forth." (Mia, Deli Serdang research village, 8 November 2019)

Mia became one of the most active members of the Homeworkers Union. In June 2013, she joined the homeworkers group at the village level – in which she is the village's group leader. Within six months, Mia had become a member of the village group for wire workers. In 2015, she was selected to lead this group. Her organisational career continued to flourish after she was selected as the Head of the Branch Managers Council for the Deli Serdang district Prosperous Workers' Union from 2016 until 2019. During her tenure, Mia was also selected to become the Regional Network Coordinator for Indonesian Homeworkers for the province of North Sumatra. In 2019, Mia was elected by members as secretary to the Prosperous Homeworkers Union Regional Representative Council.

Mia is a fast learner and has high commitment to everything she undertakes. This is demonstrated in her organisational work in which she, for instance, pays her own transport costs when she attends SPR meetings in other areas. She also always uses any leftover money from the transport money she receives through the BITRA-MAMPU partnership to pay for group activities which are not funded directly.

Mia reflects that since she became active in organisations and other activities, she has made significant changes in her life, particularly in working toward gender equality. Before becoming engaged in organisations, Mia believed that only men were suitable to become leaders, a perspective common in her community.

"Villagers don't feel that women are suited to being leaders, they tend to [support] male leaders." (Mia, Deli Serdang research village, 8 November 2019)

Before she participated in a gender training session, Mia was afraid of public speaking. She was also nervous when she met, spoke to, or was at events with government officials. However, Mia's nervousness gradually dissipated after she participated in classes and training sessions run by BITRA. These classes made Mia realise that leadership ability knows no gender or age. Mia is now sure that women can be exceptional leaders. Day by day, Mia's capacities grew fast and she was no longer anxious about voicing her thoughts in public. She later became a facilitator to create another homeworker group. Mia wanted to keep learning and to give things a try, which pushed her to fight her fears and become a more confident person.

"There are always challenges [in the learning process], as we sometimes don't believe in ourselves. I remember one time, we weren't confident meeting officials. I was trembling, like when I first joined the union and was a training facilitator for the first time. Then I also trembled when I was at the front, but I kept trying. I kept trying and trying, and I made myself confident. I hadn't ever given a welcome speech, but I tried. I kept going and didn't care even if what I was saying was wrong in some people's opinions. I said what I wanted to say. Who knows if what I said was right or not, I don't know. The point is that I tried." (Mia, Deli Serdang research village, 8 November 2019)

The skills Mia developed have opened opportunities to contribute to many important events. Mia was involved in an academic discussion forum convened by the University of North Sumatra to draft an academic paper on the status of homeworkers in district regulation. She also participated in public hearings and revision forums for the drafting of district regulation with SPRI, BITRA and the district government. She is even more proud that she was requested to attend a public hearing with the Ministry of Manpower about employment regulation. Mia says she was always prepared and willing to share her experiences in these public spaces.

"[When I was asked if I was scared], I said, 'everyone eats the same rice.' That was my guiding principal. Bu Rina said to me a lot, 'even though this isn't the head of the Local Leaders Council, it's the same, the District Head has his position. If it's the District Head's government or the Local Leaders Council, it's all the same.' We think that we are all the same, why should there be different levels of people." (Mia, Deli Serdang research village, 8 November 2019)

Mia wants to continue to grow her abilities, learn and participate in as many training sessions as possible. She will continue to fight so that homeworkers' rights and status are officially recognised by the government through district regulation. Mia hopes that instead of only a few women, all women homeworkers can apply the knowledge they have gained through BITRA trainings in village decision-making meetings. For the future, Mia hopes that women homeworkers will gain the attention of the district government and higher levels of government and, in her local community, the Village Head's attention. Mia also hopes that homeworkers who have not yet joined a union will do so, so that they can grow together with the Prosperous Homeworkers Union.

Widyati

Member of the Creative Mothers' Women Homeworkers Union
Bantul, The Special Region of Yogyakarta¹

Widyati is a forty-three-year-old homemaker and handicraft business owner in Bantul. She grew up and graduated from high school in 1993. She then moved to Batam to work in an electronics factory until returning to the village in 2008. In Batam, Widyati met with her husband who is from Medan. Widyati and her husband moved back to the Bantul village after her elderly mother, who lived alone, asked them to do so.

Widyati is an active and recognised contributor to her local community. She currently manages the early childhood education centre, is a Posyandu cadre for the elderly, a member of a working group for the village PKK and is a women's representative for the formulation of the village's Medium Term Development Plan and the 2020 Development Work Plan. Widyati considers her mother, who was also active in community life, as her inspiration.

"My mother was a cadre before, but she has already stepped down. She is still a cadre, but she is old now. The roles have reversed now and her child has replaced her." (Widyati, Bantul research village, 24 October 2019)

Since returning from Batam in 2008, Widyati and her husband have both worked to support their family financially. While her husband continued to work as an air conditioning technician in shopping malls and hotels in Yogyakarta, Widyati established a small business making sewn handicrafts. She learned these skills from her neighbour who operated her own handicrafts business. In fact, many women in this village are skilled in sewing, as sewing machines were provided as part of relief efforts following the 2006 Yogyakarta earthquake. This know-how has created many new livelihood opportunities in the village.

Widyati initially sewed for her neighbour before she was confident enough to open her own business. Now, Widyati has become an employer and has eight women working with her to make wallets, bags, and other souvenirs. These products are sold to sellers and online for a monthly turnover of six million rupiah (600 AUD).

Through this small business, Widyati has successfully improved her family's financial situation and pays for her four children's education. Before running her business, Widyati was in debt to a village women's collective to pay for her children's pocket money. In contrast, now she has been able to put her eldest child through school and support them to continue their studies at university, as well as for her three school age children: her second eldest is in high school, the third is in middle school, and her fourth is in primary school.

In 2016, Widyati became a member of the Creative Mothers' Women Homeworker Union, after being invited by the union's leader. Her recruitment was part of a drive to expand and increase the union's membership. In Widyati's hamlet, only three women are members of the union. Nevertheless, as a homemaker and someone who is interested in being involved in organisations, Widyati happily joined the union.

"Yeah, I was interested in joining it [the union]. Actually, I am a member of lots of organisations. I'm in the PKK and I'm in the Posyandu. But I can expand my knowledge. We are homeworkers, so what's this union about? I was curious." (Widyati, Bantul research village, 24 October 2019)

¹ **Author:** Mustaghfiroh Rahayu and Nadlirotul Ulfa. **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.

After joining the union. Widyati attended training sessions designed by Yasanti, including a course on gender and women's rights in 2018, and a workshop on workplace health and safety, as well as a training on strengthening livelihoods the following year. Apart from these training sessions, Widyati also increased her capacities through the Creative Mothers' monthly meetings.

"I learned a lot of things by joining the union. I learned about gender, about bookkeeping, about administration in business, and how we can manage time as a worker and as a mother who need to take care of our kids. Also, I learned about safety while working." (Widyati, Bantul research village, 24 October 2019)

In 2018, Widyati's active participation in these activities resulted in her being selected in a team of eleven people to formulate the Village Medium Term Development Plan, at the beginning of the Village Head's term. She was elected as a women's representative by village women in a village meeting. Widyati also represents the Creative Mothers' Women Homeworker Union in her position.

"It's on behalf of the union [my involvement in the team]. I just represent the union, because lots of other people are involved [to represent other groups]. There must be women's participation, so the union is part of the team with the PKK and others." (Widyati, Bantul research village, 24 October 2019)

Her involvement in the Homeworker Union has also produced a lot of change for Widyati personally. After participating in the union's gender course for two years, she now believes in herself more and has developed her leadership capacities. She also has started to hold negotiating power in the village's development agenda based on the skills and knowledge she gained in Homeworker Union and Yasanti workshops. The inclusion of the perspectives and needs of the union and women homeworkers in village meetings and development plans is one way in which Widyati has put her leadership into action.

"We were planning for five years of development. In the first year, it was about the physical side of all of the parts of the plan. We held meetings to discuss which women's representatives wanted to make proposals at the Village Meeting. We were given [invitations from the village secretary] for the Village Meeting." (Widyati, Bantul research village, 24 October 2019)

As a member of the team which sets the village government's annual work plan, Widyati was also involved in developing the Village Development Plan for 2020, as one of two women in the team of seven. This position gave Widyati the platform to make proposals to support what the union members needed.

"I, on behalf of the union, will continue to propose funds for transport and some catering when there are meetings. It needs to be budgeted for. I will continue to propose it in the future. Every year at Musrenbang, I will propose it. Workplan representatives always propose training sessions and transport funds for meetings. So, women are motivated to join organisations. Now they are only given a little bit, which really makes no difference. [There should be funds] so that if women come [to a training session] for a long time, they can have a drink." (Widyati, Bantul research village, 24 October 2019)

Over the past six years, Widyati has also developed her business and become an employer of fulltime workers. Widyati learned about business financial administration in a Yasanti training session which focused on bookkeeping. Now she clearly records her income and expenditure.

"To strengthen our livelihoods, bookkeeping is the most valuable. I was so hopeless when it comes to bookkeeping. I didn't know how to do it. During the training, I learned how to do it. My bookkeeping is neat now, and ever since I am aware how much money I earn, and how much I spend. Thanks to

bookkeeping, now I know all of that. I also learned how to make priorities. The training taught us how to be careful what we spend. (Widyati, Bantul research village, 24 October 2019)

Yasanti has also provided Widyati with knowledge about workplace health and safety. From these materials, she has learned a lot about how to take care of her body while working, an aspect of work which is often regarded as unimportant by homeworkers who do not have standards of workplace environment like at a company.

"I sew and to do this I have to sit in a good position, I have to have drinking water near me when I am sewing and take comfort breaks as well. I shouldn't just sew without stopping. [I also learned] about how to manage our eating habits and take care of ourselves. I learned a lot about that there." (Widyati, Bantul research village, 24 October 2019)

Widyati's husband fully supports all her activities in their local community. As a couple, they do not think about who produces more income, instead, Widyati manages both her and her husband's income to ensure that it covers everyday needs and their children's education.

"For my husband, as long as I carry out my obligations as a wife, like picking up the kids and other things, I am free to participate in activities, especially if those activities are beneficial." (Widyati, Bantul research village, 24 October 2019)

Despite gaining a lot of benefits from her involvement in the Creative Mothers' Homeworker Union and Yasanti, Widyati still feels concerned about the conditions of women homeworkers and wants the government to pay equal attention to homeworkers and factory workers. In her opinion, homeworkers are still often regarded as not important, even though they make significant contributions to the district economy and strengthen their own family livelihoods. Widyati hopes that homeworkers will receive social and health services, decent wages, and that laws and regulations are developed which protect their rights.



Part 4:

Improving Women's Health and Nutrition

Hatini

Head of the Women Farmers Group and 'Aisiyah Reproductive Health Cadre Cirebon, West Java¹

Hatini is a thirty-nine-year-old 'Aisiyah cadre from a village in Cirebon district. Like many villagers, Hatini only has a primary school education. This low level of education has produced a widespread lack of self-belief among this community, including for Hatini. Before joining 'Aisiyah, Hatini was considered a very shy person. She previously worked in a factory before quitting and opening a small food stall at her house where she sells vegetables and fried snacks.

Before becoming an 'Aisiyah cadre, Hatini was an active member of Posyandu (from 2007) and PKK (from 2008). As a Posyandu cadre, she was in charge of tuberculosis prevention in 2013. However, in all three roles, she feels that she had limited involvement.

"[As a Posyandu cadre], my task was just to weigh babies from this hamlet. As a PKK cadre, there were PKK meetings to attend in the village and subdistrict. They were my main tasks. Doing this, supervising or like that, knowing how many students attended school. I gathered data about the school. As a TB cadre, I was with Bu Sri², we took part and had to find people who were sick with tuberculosis and report them to the community health centre." (Hatini, Cirebon research village, 2 March 2019)

When 'Aisiyah's Cirebon district Regional Head introduced a women's empowerment program in the village in 2014, Hatini was given the opportunity to join as a reproductive health cadre. She was selected by the Village Head temporary administrator through the Village Secretary, because of her experience in the PKK and Posyandu.

This new role opened new opportunities for Hatini to gain new knowledge. Hatini's cadre training was the starting point of her getting to know places far beyond her village, such as when Hatini stayed in a hotel to attend a training about leadership and information about women's reproductive health which she had never had an opportunity to learn before. Through these training sessions, Hatini learned to express her opinions.

"I am happy that I have gained so much new knowledge from 'Aisiyah. The first time was at a nice hotel. 'Aisiyah helps the village cadres. If there's any issues they will take it up, even if it's in the village, or the subdistrict government. It's really good. [Cadres] are supported and now we are confident. We are confident to express our opinions about anything really." (Hatini, Cirebon research village, 2 March 2019)

As a reproductive health cadre, Hatini has gained new knowledge and experiences of organising. Apart from new information about women's reproductive health, she has also gained experience in how to recruit new cadres to the women's group Balai Sakinah 'Aisiyah. Hatini coordinates Balai Sakinah 'Aisiyah activities in her hamlet, works together with other cadres and regularly communicates with district 'Aisiyah leaders. Through meetings, she meets other village women and talks about their everyday lives and the reproductive health program, as well as other women's issues like food supplies and children's education. As Hatini is close with 'Aisiyah's district leaders, she has become a go-between to explain health information to the community and report on community needs, even if they are outside of the program's focus on reproductive health, such as issues about processing vital identity documents.

¹ **Authors:** Desi Rahmawati and Nadlirotul Ulfa. **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.

² See the life story of Srikandi.

Hatini carries out all her activities as a cadre with tenacity and has developed her individual leadership skills. At the end of 2018, Hatini, who many know to be hard working, had the opportunity to manage 'Aisyiyah's Nutrition Garden – a small garden for growing vegetables. The Nutrition Garden is a trial project of the Cirebon 'Aisyiyah district leaders to explore livelihood activities which align with the interests of women in rural areas. Initially, Hatini thought this opportunity would be beneficial to develop her interest in farming. Hatini's husband also receives additional income for helping to tend the garden.

As time went by, the Nutrition Garden created many positive changes for Hatini and other village women, primarily through the creation of the MAMPU-'Aisyiyah Women's Farmers Group in 2019. This group has the potential to solidify women's collective action in this village by providing an alternative space for cadres to develop positive and productive group activities. In the group, cadres lead group activities like farming and learning how to market farming products – skills which are very beneficial to village women's lives.³ As Hatini was first in charge of tending the Nutrition Garden, she became the leader of the Women's Farmers Group. Armed with the leadership skills she gained from 'Aisyiyah cadre training, Hatini swung into action and quickly started to carry out her tasks as leader, such as managing the division of tasks between members and distributing their harvest.

"All my friends said, 'how about if Bu Hatini does it? So, I became the head [of the Women's] Farmers group]. I said, 'oh I don't want to.' [They said], 'you manage the garden, so you're the leader ... That's what I do ... If there are a lot of weeds, then I say to my friends 'come and do weeding.' I am given funds from 'Aisyiyah to hoe the garden, to get rid of the pests, to do anything ... With the group, [I say] 'you sell this, sell this many bunches.' I divide it amongst the group, 'you sell this for this price.' (Hatini, Cirebon research village, 2 March 2019)

Gradually, Hatini became more confident in expressing her opinions. She proposed the Nutrition Garden's new position so that it would be close to the village office and market. To do this, Hatini first conveyed her idea to 'Aisyiyah district leaders who passed it on to the Village Head. Her public speaking skills too have helped Hatini lead the Women's Farmers Group, build social relationships with village women, and put her leadership skills into action. Working at her vegetable stall and gathering with other women to practice tambourine (*jamiah*) are now opportunities to exchange opinions.

Consequently, Hatini felt confident to propose the acquisition of tambourines at the 2018 village Musrenbang, to be purchased through the village budget. For the local community, tambourines have meaning far beyond just being music instruments. Tambourine groups are informal spaces for women to gather and express themselves in an artistic and spiritual way, as well as meet other women and talk about their everyday lives and problems.

Hatini now inspires many women in the village. Her work with 'Aisyiyah has also made her confident and provided her with advice on how to save money to finance her children's schooling and further study. Her eldest daughter is now completing a higher education degree at the State Islamic Religious College in Cirebon (STAIN).

"I want to know how to put my children through school, so they become useful. I have been thinking about this since my children started high school. How can I put you through school and university so you can get a good job. [My motivation] at the start was when I saw people attending meetings outside of this region. That's what I want my children to do. Then, 'Aisyiyah supported me and said, 'you can

³ In early 2019, the Women's Farmers Group managed village-owned land (approximately 7,000m²) and planted a variety of vegetables, including eggplant and chilli. In September 2019, the Women's Farmers Group expanded the project by planting fruit. They plan to sell their produce in at a stall in the village market.

definitely do it but you need a business they said. You can definitely do it [pay for your children's schooling] if you want to.” (Hatini, Cirebon research village, 2 March 2019)

As the first family in their hamlet to have a child in higher education, Hatini has become a positive example in her local community. Now young people from several other families have also begun attending university. Hatini's involvement in 'Aisyiyah has even inspired her daughter to join.

“I have seen really positive [impacts] for my mum. Now she is not scared when she is trading [in the market]. Whatever she does she pushes forward herself. For the Nutritional Garden she has been supported by her family and 'Aisyiyah. Before she wasn't very brave in public. Now, thanks be to God, she is confident to be social in groups and in organisations. I participated in 'Aisyiyah's cadre school and stayed overnight to do it. I learned a lot from 'Aisyiyah in 2018 and was also involved in socialising livelihood skills to the community.” (Hatini's daughter, Cirebon research village, 3 March 2019).

Hatini hopes that her experience will continue to inspire women of all ages in the village to join organisations and work for their communities.

Srikandi

'Aisyiyah Cadre

Cirebon, West Java¹

Srikandi, or Sri as she is usually known, is a forty-eight-year old housewife and 'Aisyiyah cadre. Twenty years ago, Sri moved to the village from an area on the outskirts of Cirebon city and now has three sons. The hilltop hamlet where Sri and her husband live is the most underdeveloped area in the village, and road infrastructure was only completed under the leadership of the Village Head (or *kuwu* in the local language) who was elected in 2008.

Despite the many changes led by this Village Head, Sri still lives in a community with low levels of education, limited livelihood opportunities, and ongoing sanitation and health problems. Many villagers work and use the river, although some also channel ground water from rice fields to their homes. The challenge of accessing clean water is exacerbated by the prevalence of infectious diseases, such as leprosy and tuberculosis, and non-communicable diseases such as cancer and high blood pressure.

Sri, who finished her formal education in middle school, began to be interested in becoming a 'Aisyiyah cadre in 2008 on the suggestion of the Village Head who had also previously put her forward to join the village's Posyandu. The Village Head (Pak Kuwu), who is similarly a migrant from another region in Cirebon, moved to Sri's area after marrying the cousin of Sri's husband, and got to know her, demonstrating the importance of family networks. However, Sri's selection was not solely due to family connections, but rather on the capacities, knowledge and experience she had from her work with the maternal and child health group (Posyandu) and other community organisations.

"In 2008, I became a cadre. I think it was Pak Kuwu who selected me. He said I am an active person, active and well-intentioned. Because of Pak Kuwu, I became a cadre. I was a Posyandu cadre first." (Sri, Cirebon research village, 25 February 2019)

Before she was chosen to be a village cadre in 2008, Sri was active in the primary school committee and photoshoots for local public health announcements.

"He said, if you persevere, your plans can come to fruition. He said, it appears that I am an active person. ... I used to be on the school committee too in 2006 [and] I was filmed [for community service announcements]. When I was in the commercial, I had to say, 'Assalamualaikum, I want to report that my chicken has died of bird flu.'" (Sri, Cirebon research village, 25 February 2019)

Shortly after being selected as Posyandu volunteer, Sri began to be involved in more community work, including the PKK and at the local health centre (Puskesmas). Before 'Aisyiyah's Cirebon district regional leaders started working in the village, Sri worked as a Puskesmas tuberculosis cadre. This gave her the opportunity to also appear in other films made by the United States Agency for International Development and the Nahdlatul Ulama Health Foundation. In both films, Sri demonstrated her high level of concern toward those in her community infected with tuberculosis.

¹ **Authors:** Desi Rahmawati and Nadlirotul Ulfa. **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, the Village Head recommended that she become an 'Aisiyiah reproductive health cadre. Unlike her appointment to the Posyandu in 2008, this appointment was made by a temporary administrator in place of the Village Head in the lead up to the election, who was not related to Sri. This recommendation responded to 'Aisiyiah's Regional Management's request to the Village Head to recruit village women for their program.

In her new role, Sri began to educate the local community on reproductive health. She also recruits cadres and coordinates with Balai Sakinah 'Aisiyiah, which is a grassroots women's group which, amongst others, focuses on reproductive health education for poor women. Sri reflects that initially that she did not fully understand the terms for sicknesses or treatments, nor the symptoms of illnesses and how to respond to them when she worked at the health clinics. Yet, through her involvement with 'Aisiyiah, Sri acquired new knowledge, particularly regarding women's reproductive health.

"At the start I didn't understand, I just weighed babies without understanding [about health]. Sometimes I went to training sessions for the birth preparation program and also didn't understand. If I'm not wrong 'Aisiyiah arrived in 2014 [...] It was reproductive health that initially I didn't understand. After there were regular Balai Sakinah 'Aisiyiah meetings, I also continued to ask what is 'reproductive health'? At first, I did not understand what cervical cancer was, I only knew what I saw on television. After participating in programs from 'Aisiyiah MAMPU, then I knew that cervical cancer is very dangerous." (Sri, Cirebon research village, 25 February 2019)

As a health volunteer without a wage or reimbursement for transport, Sri often educates women in her village about reproductive health. She also visits patients to inform them about diseases and to encourage them to seek and maintain treatment. Sri's family experience motivates her to be a health volunteer in her community. Sri's father suffered with a debilitating cough for years until his death without knowing the cause of his illness. Sri carries this memory and traumatic experience with her. When Sri meets someone who is unwell, she often imagines that she is helping her father. This empathy is her primary motivating force to volunteer and to always ask and find out more about illnesses and how to treat them. Sri regards her work as a cadre as her moral responsibility.

"I don't know, it is just like I have, I feel like I have that responsibility. [If] you have an obligation, you feel it, if you have not carried it out, the feeling is like curiosity. Having a responsibility ... So, we are cadres, even though there are no salaries [but it feels], that means I have been chosen [so] I must be a charitable person. Cadre, it is a shortening of charitable activities." (Sri, Cirebon research village, 25 February 2019)

Sri's sense of empathy, which has been supported by 'Aisiyiah's district leaders, has strengthened her resolve to work with the community health centre. After she became a cadre, her enthusiasm for knowing about illnesses and diseases and sharing this information in the community grew. Sri also began contributing to many other health clinic programs, including for midwives, palliative care, men's awareness of maternal health, gastrointestinal health, non-communicable illnesses, and leprosy. She also plans to become a cadre for aged care and mental health as part of a new program in the village.

Her work with the local health clinic is closely connected with her work as an 'Aisiyiah cadre. The knowledge she learned through 'Aisiyiah programs made her even more committed to want to visit residents. Without an allowance for transportation, she visits unwell people in her area. Sri has become a contact person for women who have health concerns, she talks to local women, examines women who are worried about growing lumps in their breasts and encourages them to go to the local health clinic or the city hospital. Sri travels around her village every day on the minibus or is driven by her sons to the village's midwifery centre (Pondok Bersalin Desa, Polindes) and the health clinic. Sri even delivers prescription medicine to local women and ensures that patients take medications in line with instructions.

According to a former village midwife, Sri is a role model:

“For everyone she is the do-er who wants to care about the environment, about the groups who are around here... Let alone being a Posyandu cadre, like Mrs Sri, sometimes the people [in the research village] are really difficult, fear is great here. A feeling of fear that ‘oh no, I am not an educated person’ still exists. But as she is already used to gathering in the village like that, she wants to learn and she really wants to know, so she motivates herself to be strong.” (Midwife subdistrict coordinator, Cirebon research village, 25 February 2019)

The community has increasingly recognised Sri’s dedication to her work. In 2018, unbeknownst to her, she was elected to be the head of her Rukun Warga² in a meeting attended only by men. Sri was also selected as one of sixteen inspirational women in Indonesia to the International Women's Day event “Listening to Grassroots Women” (*Mendengarkan Perempuan dari Arus Bawah*) which was opened by President Joko Widodo at the State Palace in Jakarta. At this event, Sri was the sole woman representing Cirebon Regency and ‘Aisyiyah. At the end of 2019, she was also recognised at the district level and awarded second prize in a competition on creating social welfare. These awards are the result of Sri’s hard work, commitment, and dedication to sharing knowledge. They also are not Sri’s ultimate achievement, but instead have made her even more enthusiastic to work for women in her village and the wider community. Sri is committed to always inform others about health and healthcare and to support women in her village to deepen their understanding cervical cancer and breast cancer, as well as family planning. She hopes that the care she shows her community will increase the awareness of health issues and standard of healthcare in her village.

² A small area and division of local government under hamlet (*dusun*) and above Rukun Tetangga.

Sulis

FAKTA-DAMAR Member

Tanggamus, Lampung¹

Forty-five-year-old Sulis is the eldest of three children and grew up in the research village in Tanggamus district. Sulis worked to help her family earn a living from a young age by caring for their goats, selling coconuts, and farming cassava and sago. While at school, Sulis was also active in the Islamic youth organisation RISMA (Muslim Teenagers of the Mosque).

After graduating from high school in 1994, Sulis decided to move to Tangerang and work at an electronics company. Sulis remembers that moving away from the village, and especially to Jakarta, was popular at the time and usually happened when one person moved first and then invited others to join them. Moving away from the village was popular because of the limited employment options in the village. In 1997, Sulis returned to the village with her child, two years after she got married. The distance between Sulis and her then husband proved to be a strain on their relationship and ten years later they divorced. Sulis later remarried with a man from her village.

Upon her return to the village, Sulis started organising music activities for children at a prayer house. This commitment to village youth led the Village Head, who had been elected in 2006, to select her as Head of the Community Welfare Section.

“After he saw me showing children how to play the tambourine for hadroh and rebana, seeing me teach the children at the prayer house for the first time, he [the Village Head] approached me. I didn’t know him before.” (Sulis, Tanggamus research village, 12 July 2019)

The Village Head asked whether Sulis’ husband was prepared for her to take on this responsibility and emphasised that her role would mean she would come face to face with both women and men’s issues. Sulis’ husband gave his permission and support for her to work as a village official. Since her appointment, Sri thinks she has learned a lot from the Village Head.

“If I was aware of it or not, I have been given a lot of knowledge by the Village Head. The conscious learning has been about how to carry out my duties, but unconsciously I have also learned from chatting because, thanks be to God, I am often invited to chat and when chatting I pick up information like my business, my basic food supplies stall, it is the product of chatting with the Village Head.” (Sulis, Tanggamus research village, 12 July 2019)

By the time of research in 2019, Sulis had been in her position as Head of the Community Welfare Section for thirteen years, despite having asked on multiple occasions to be replaced because of the workload. This reluctance to replace her is because the Village Head trusts Sulis and also does not think that there are others who can fulfill the role.

¹ **Authors:** Azifah R. Astrina and Nadlirotul Ulfa. **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.

"I said to the Village Head a few years ago that I wanted to be replaced. I said, 'please replace me, I am too busy.' He said, 'you're just joking, I also feel like that ... you do it.'" (Sulis, Tanggamus research village, 12 July 2019)

As a village official, Sulis is entitled to a wage every six months. All village officials agreed to be paid every six months as to prioritise spending on village development, but if needed Sulis can ask to be paid earlier. Sulis is known in her community as a trusted person to confide in, which helps in her role as she must be in close contact with residents.

"People started confiding in me in my first period in office with the Village Head. Because that's my job for the community. I have built this trust with the community. Imagine if we just worked in the office and didn't pay attention to people who really needed our attention. I get close to them. Thanks be to God, for the thirteen years I have been part of the community team, I haven't had my role changed by the Village Head." (Sulis, Tanggamus research village, 12 July 2019)

Sulis has also been a key contact point to explain to the community about government health insurance. Her experience of taking care of her mother, who was diagnosed with breast cancer and died in 2015, made Sulis diligent in finding information about health services.

"I willed myself to find for information about government health insurance, because there wasn't any information immediately available in the village. If people asked for the village government to explain, they would. From there, I knew how to process my application. But lots of people in the community are still scared to come to the hospital and ask about government health insurance, so they come to me." (Sulis, Tanggamus research village, 12 July 2019)

Sulis promotes village and community health centre programs, including working together with the village midwife for a Blood Bank to provide much needed blood transfusion supplies, as many residents do not know their blood type. This Blood Bank was funded by an allocation from the Village Fund and other funds. The largest challenge faced by this program is that many members of the community are afraid of injections.

Sulis' concern for her community led to the Village Head selecting her to take part in DAMAR's program. Like many villagers, Sulis was open to new information – an attitude shaped by their background as transmigrants. Since the first training in 2007, Sulis has often participated in DAMAR activities, both in the village and in Bandar Lampung.

"I give DAMAR the thumbs up. They were really patient teaching us about gender. Participants started to really understand, I am so happy that I was a participant, I give my thumbs up to DAMAR." (Sulis, Tanggamus research village, 12 July 2019)

Sulis created change for herself and her husband after participating in DAMAR workshops, on topics including gender awareness and women's health. The most fundamental change was Sulis' understanding of gender equality and its importance. Previously, Sulis says that her husband regarded men as being on the top and then women below them.

"There are a lot of changes and there were many things which I didn't understand before. Before, I thought that men really were number one, that there were men and then there were women. But thanks be to God, my husband supported me. He works in education, reads, and knows a lot. He gave

permission to me to go to any activities, anywhere. If we wanted to go somewhere, we went. He always let me.” (Sulis, Tanggamus research village, 12 July 2019)

Sulis’ perspective on this hierarchy changed with the materials given by DAMAR. Over time, Sulis – supported by her education background and love of reading – felt able to talk to her husband about how to understand gender equality. She explained to him how community notions of women’s roles and importance were social constructions and that women and men both have important roles in society. Over time, her husband supported her participation in DAMAR, as long as the activities had positive effects.

“The impact on me was that I understood that the work of women and men was the same, you know? The only difference is that we breastfeed, give birth, etc. For me personally, because maybe I am a tomboyish girl, so many people say that I can easily do men’s work. I take care of the house, [get involved] at the village meeting hall, and if I shop a lot, I still carry it myself.” (Sulis, Tanggamus research village, 12 July 2019)

Apart from expanding her understanding of gender, Sulis’ leadership capacities also grew. Even though she had participated in organisations for a long time, Sulis thinks that the DAMAR leadership training has made her more confident to share and work to create positive change in her community.

“[DAMAR training] really influenced me. What I mean by it influencing me is that I feel more confident to share with the community, to work for the community. This is what DAMAR has done for me and what I learned from DAMAR.” (Sulis, Tanggamus research village, 12 July 2019)

For Sulis, DAMAR’s training has enhanced her leadership capabilities. It was the catalyst for her nomination for the 2020 Village Head election, in which she will compete against the Village Head who selected her as Head of Community Welfare. Despite this election being delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Sulis remains determined. She is a trusted source of advice for village social services and advocate for greater understanding of health. Sulis’ desire to become Village Head demonstrates how she has further progressed along a path of political empowerment. In the future, Sulis aims to continue to share her understanding of gender equality and serve her community.

Mariana

FAKTA-DAMAR Village Coordinator

Tanggamus, Lampung¹

Forty-seven-year-old Mariana is the only female Hamlet Head in her village in Tanggamus district. In 2006, Mariana, who graduated from high school, was selected as Hamlet Head by the Village Head to replace her father. Mariana's husband sells curtains outside the village, which means that Mariana is often home alone with their two children. Their son studies in Bandar Lampung, while their daughter is still in primary school. As well as being a village government official, Mariana also runs their household and has worked as an early childhood educator since 2008.

The majority of villagers in Mariana's village are transmigrants from Central Java. Because of this, villagers are generally open towards new people who bring new knowledge and a strong culture of community organisations. Since becoming Hamlet Head, Mariana has become active as she must attend PKK and Posyandu activities as well as village government meetings. As a female Hamlet Head, she also is a trusted confidante for village women.

"Since I became Hamlet Head, I often go around the area, I mean sometimes people have something to ask and I sit with them. Because I am a woman and Hamlet Head, they feel fine to talk about anything. We all don't have a lot. I just give them suggestions. We are all poor. We all work with our bodies. So we just give suggestions. All the women here are open with me." (Mariana, Tanggamus research village, 5 July 2019)

As well as being asked about financial difficulties, Mariana is often asked for suggestions on how to educate children. This is because Mariana is known in the village as having successfully brought up both her children to be kind and respectful to their parents. Her son was a high achieving student and school and won a scholarship for university which, she emphasises, strongly contrasts with the many misbehaving teenagers in their area.

"[Women] mostly talk to me about their financial problems, and about how to educate their children. In this area, my children are examples, even though I brought them up just normally. It just depends on your kid. About finances, [people ask me], I earn this much but why is it still not enough. Sometimes women are sad, and I feel what they feel." (Mariana, Tanggamus research village, 5 July 2019)

As Hamlet Head and someone who is seen as a good example, Mariana is committed to keep learning and enhance her capacities. When FAKTA-DAMAR entered the village and began to offer women's empowerment activities, Mariana was immediately interested to join – a decision her husband supported.

"I want to become someone who is intelligent. Someone who isn't insecure when I socialise with someone who is more than me. The thing is that we have already joined with the Village Administrators and subdistrict officials." (Mariana, Tanggamus research village, 5 July 2019)

In 2008, Mariana first participated in FAKTA-DAMAR at the first Lampung Women's Movement (Gerakan Perempuan Lampung – GPL) congress in Bandar Lampung. GPL is a DAMAR initiative to strengthen women's associations from all six of Lampung's districts. The Tanggamus women's association, FAKTA, works together

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with DAMAR to advocate for the fulfilment of women's basic rights, one of which is sexual and reproductive health rights.

After taking part in this congress, Mariana stopped attending FAKTA-DAMAR events. At the time, there was not a lot of funding for women's empowerment in Lampung, so few programs were implemented at the district level. Five years later, Mariana began to participate once more after being contacted by a FAKTA community organiser. In around 2013, DAMAR planned a gender course for six women's associations – a course which benefited many women, including Mariana.

Mariana's first training workshops were themed "Gender Justice and Anti-Violence" and "Social Analysis from a Feminist Perspective." After this course, Mariana became a member of FAKTA-DAMAR and quickly, after taking part in another course, became a cadre. And, after taking part in a fourth training workshop on "Women's Leadership and Organisational Governance", Mariana became a cadre instructor.

For Mariana, these courses helped her to understand gender equality and gender issues. These FAKTA-DAMAR activities also extended her friendship networks with whom she could share her experiences.

"[I learned] about gender equality. Thanks be to God I got new knowledge there and lots of friends from Central Lampung and East Lampung. After that, we talked to each other in groups. We were supported by FAKTA, DAMAR and the Lampung State University." (Mariana, Tanggamus research village, 5 July 2019)

In 2015, with MAMPU's support, FAKTA-DAMAR began running gender training in Mariana's village. Mariana became the coordinator of the four specialist classes for women, men, as well as teenage girls and boys. She patiently introduced the FAKTA-DAMAR network and their programs to villagers.

"I had to be patient. First, I used formal invitations. I went door-to-door introducing FAKTA-DAMAR. After I had done this a lot, it started to be shared mouth-to-mouth. I had to be patient at the start to say that DAMAR has good knowledge for us which we can then share with our neighbours. After a while, they started going to the classes themselves. We also gave materials, so people can use them in their everyday lives." (Mariana, Tanggamus research village, 5 July 2019)

Mariana reflects that she has created significant change in her household, especially about the sharing of domestic chores. At first, Mariana thought that her husband was responsible for financially providing for the family, while she should take care of the house and bring up the children. But, over time, this perception changed as she shared information she gained at training workshops with her husband and children, and they too realised the importance of sharing domestic chores.

"Thank God, for me personally there have been a lot of changes. Before, in the house, my husband didn't want to cook, or for us to share roles, such as split the cooking or the cleaning. [Now] if I come home in the afternoon, he is the one who cooks, he can sweep too. [We are] sharing roles, working together. [We are] not distinguishing what work is for women or men." (Mariana, Tanggamus research village, 5 July 2019)

Upon seeing the positive effects for their family, Mariana's husband supported the program. Mariana also signed up her son in the gender class for teenage boys. She hoped that this class would make him value gender equality.

"There have been changes about how to educate my children too. Yes, before, my child didn't want to wash his own dishes. After he participated in the young men's activities, [he thought] yeah, he should

help his mother with the work. This is very meaningful for us, and then we shared it with friends.”
(Mariana, Tanggamus research village, 5 July 2019)

Apart from these changes at home, Mariana’s participation in the FAKTA-DAMAR program has also enhanced her capacities as a village official. Now, she has more self-belief to give welcome addresses at village meetings for the PKK and Posyandu.

“Since I joined FAKTA-DAMAR, there have been lots of changes. From learning new information at training workshops to putting it into action. For us personally, the knowledge is really beneficial. Before I joined FAKTA-DAMAR, I didn’t socialise or believe in myself. After joining and doing the training, I believe in myself. Talking sometimes was hard. At meetings I gave welcome speeches, they just had limited scope, like for the hamlet PKK. But after I went to FAKTA-DAMAR training, something changed.”
(Mariana, Tanggamus research village, 5 July 2019)

Through her involvement in FAKTA-DAMAR, Mariana has both gained understanding of gender equality and applied it in her family by dividing domestic chores with her husband. As Hamlet Head, Mariana is an empathetic leader and shares her understanding of gender and justice.

Mariana hopes that FAKTA-DAMAR’s women’s empowerment activities will continue, so that village women will continue to increase their knowledge and that more women can join. Nevertheless, increasing involvement in women’s empowerment activities still have challenges. Women need their husband’s permission to attend and many prohibit their wives from joining. To overcome this challenge, Mariana persistently shares the information and skill she has gained in all spheres of her life, from within her own family, to meetings, village events and when she is shopping at food stalls.



Part 5:

Reducing Violence against Women

Tari

Deputy Head of the Village Independent Women's Union

Labuhan Batu, North Sumatra¹

Tari is the Deputy Head of the village Independent Women's Union and Head of the Community Based Service. She is forty-five years old and began to be involved in the Independent Women's Union in 2015, when she was invited by the then Head who is her neighbour. Tari has experienced many changes since becoming a member of the Independent Women's Union (Serikat Perempuan Independen – SPI), including becoming more confident to voice her opinion in public, developing her leadership capabilities and improving her group work skills.

As many villagers, Tari is a migrant from Bandung. In 2004, Tari moved with her parents to the village after they retired as labourers in an oil palm plantation. Tari's husband is from Pangkatan in North Sumatra and works as a travelling tailor. Before becoming active in the SPI, Tari's primary role was managing their household.

Prior to 2015, Tari was not interested in joining the SPI at all, even though her house is across the road from the founder of the union in the village. She explains that her initial reluctance to join was because of her perception that women's organisations were only for gossip and did not have clear aims or action plans.

"I used to be invited a lot to prayer groups [pengajian], but I didn't want to. Sometimes I answered with a joke: 'what will be the outcome for me if I come? Women who go to prayer groups here just pretend to be socialites.' Sometimes we are not comfortable with that. But that was before, now sometimes I go to a prayer group. The PKK too, I was invited but I didn't want to go, I responded 'I'm not interested in the PKK yet.' Until now, I haven't participated in the PKK. Why would I want to go, the PKK just gather, drink tea, chat, and then go home." (Tari, Labuhan Batu research village, 13 October 2019)

One of Tari's colleagues recalls how she was known as a closed person who rarely socialised before she joined the SPI (Soemiyati, Labuhan Batu research village, 13 October 2019). However, this slowly changed once she joined. Tari first attended union activities on a whim, but gradually began to feel the importance of the new information and skills she could gain by joining the village SPI.

"The first time I came to SPI was because I was invited and I thought I had nothing to lose by getting a cake and if the activity was outside the village you could go in a car. But then after a while I understood the material, and I liked it." (Tari, Labuhan Batu research village, 13 October 2019)

New members like Tari were first given introductory materials about gender equality, women's rights and about the Anti-Domestic Violence Law. As she learned, Tari became increasingly emotionally invested in what she was learning and started being more active and confident to speak in SPI discussions. Tari's courage to speak pushed her to contribute to larger forums, including Hamlet Meetings, Village Meetings, and the village Musrenbang in 2016. At these meetings, as a member of the Village SPI, Tari advocated for and monitored the drafting of a Village Regulation on the Protection of Women and Children.

"We had to come to the village meeting at first with Kak Liana, our leader. And if you came, you had to talk. 'Why not come and just sit', she'd say. I didn't want to go and especially didn't want to talk. I was

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just lazy and didn't really care. Sometimes I wanted to say something, but my mouth wouldn't say anything because I was already shaking, even if I just thought about speaking. But then I remembered her message. Finally, I began to slowly be brave and speak. For example, in the question and answer session, I will immediately ask a question. But beforehand we prepare ourselves by reading the law. At the least we know the broad outline of the law and article numbers, so when people hear us, they think we really understand it." (Tari, Labuhan Batu research village, 13 October 2019)

Data compiled by SPI about cases of violence in the village strengthened the cooperation between the Union and the village government. In 2016, this led to the establishment of the Community Based Service for victims of domestic violence and two years later to the enactment of Village Regulation No. 2 2018 about the Implementation of the Protection of Women and Children Victims of Violence. During the drafting of the Village Regulation, Tari contacted the head of the Village Consultative Council and the Village Head to ensure that it was drafted correctly. When SPI began informing villagers about the Community Based Service in the village, Tari was selected to become its leader. In this position, Tari attends village forums to advocate for the rights of women and children.

"At the start it was like this, for a long time we worked by ourselves as an organisation. When there's a victim what happens if we don't go? ... Before the Village Regulation we worked by ourselves for a long time and were known for it." (Tari, Labuhan Batu research village, 13 October 2019)

In her paralegal work with the Community Based Service, Tari has witnessed changes in her community as more people have begun to understand domestic violence and women's rights. While before the 2018 Village Regulation, many village women chose to tell only a few close confidantes about violence they experienced, including women in Tari's own family, now women feel more comfortable to report violence. After the 2018 Village Regulation passed, Tari and her SPI colleagues feel supported by the village government and community to respond to cases of violence.

"Before the Village Regulation, we were just working alone. After it passed and people knew more about it, more victims want to report. So, there are more that are known about, more [cases] which are reported, more [who think] ok, if something happens like that there is help. After a while, this village became a village which cares." (Tari, Labuhan Batu research village, 13 October 2019)

Tari's active role in community organisations is a significant personal achievement, particularly as she had not regularly been involved in social activities before. Before joining SPI, many villagers did not really know Tari, and were even shocked to discover that a few years ago she had given birth to a son while many had not even known she was pregnant. Conversely, now nearly all villagers recognise Tari as a village leader.

Tari's high level thinking and speaking skills distinguish her from other Union members and have been strengthened since joining SPI. Tari feels that joining SPI has opened her eyes to the problems which women face. Through training about how to respond to domestic violence, Tari became more confident to mediate couple's problems. From the experiences of her colleagues, Tari has come to think that mediation requires patience.

"One thing we learned was how to support. The principle of supporting victims is to listen to the victim, we must be patient. By doing this we become patient." (Tari, Labuhan Batu research village, 13 October 2019)

Her husband and children have really supported Tari's involvement in the village SPI. Her first daughter, Diana, has also worked as an intern at the district-level SPI. This opportunity for Diana to learn about domestic violence and gender equality made Tari very proud. The insights Diana gained also shaped her decision to

study law at university. Diana hopes that with her law degree she will be able to help victims of violence to get justice.

Tari is still the Deputy Head of the Village SPI and Head of the Community Based Service. She thinks that village women's problems, particularly violence, are no longer regarded as private matters, but rather collective issues. The existence of the Community Based Service has also pushed other village actors to be responsible for the many cases of violence against women.

"It's not like the SPI has special training to become braver but we have events where we say 'please ask'. Like a while ago we had a survivor's strengthening meeting at Café Aira. [We said] 'C'mon please say anything, don't be afraid to be wrong.' So indirectly we do [teach women to be brave]. The instructors also did the same encouraging, fishing for answers with me when I started, 'don't think about if it's right or wrong.' Just be confident to speak." (Tari, Labuhan Batu research village, 13 October 2019)

In the future, Tari wants to continue to support women in the village to fight against violence against women. Tari hopes that through the village SPI she can improve women's self-confidence and capacities, so that they can create better lives for themselves.

Laeli

Chairperson of the Village Constituent Group

East Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara¹

Laeli (forty-years-old) is the Head of the Constituent Group in a village in East Lombok. She moved to this village after she married and ever since has been active in village community life. Laeli is also the Deputy Head of the PKK. She was appointed to this position because her husband is the Head of the Village Consultative Council. As her husband is also a Branch Organiser for Nahdlatul Ulama, Laeli is active in the Muslimat group.

Despite having a Diploma II in Kindergarten Teaching, Laeli decided to start a business in the village. She produces crackers to order and runs a small tofu production business at the back of her house. Three other women help Laeli make the crackers. They are her neighbours and were divorced by their husbands. Laeli acknowledges that she felt inclined to help them. Moreover, employing them expands her small cracker business.

"I employ a lot of women, particularly widows and divorcees. Women who have been left by their husbands who are migrant workers, who were thought of as burdens. Husbands divorce their wives and then go to Malaysia or other countries and don't care for their children. So, their ex-wife has to find money. I employ three women like this for the cracker business. For the tofu business, because the work is heavy, I employ men." (Laeli, East Lombok research village, 5 July 2019)

Laeli borrowed sixty million rupiah (6,000 AUD) from the bank to establish her small tofu factory. While several workers help to produce the crackers and tofu, Laeli manages the marketing herself. Every morning, Laeli sells tofu to the local community, after she has completed all domestic tasks and taken care of her husband and daughter. Occasionally, Laeli is helped by a neighbour to complete housework, but usually she does all the cleaning, washing, cooking herself, as well as looking after her husband who she calls 'spoilt' because he refuses to help her around the house.

Laeli's busy schedule of her business and housework has not reduced her community work. Laeli has been a member of the Constituent Group since it was founded by BaKTI. Initially, the former Head of the PKK invited Laeli to join a Village Discussion organised by BaKTI and the village government. Then, when the Constituent Group began to be formed, she was elected secretary because she was so active in the community.

"I am in the PKK, the Posyandu ... I am busy selling. I am also the secretary of the Constituent Group and an early childhood educator. Laeli. She's a teacher." (Laeli, East Lombok research village, 5 July 2019)

When the Chairperson of the Constituent Group stepped down because he felt that he was too busy, Laeli was asked to replace him. Laeli refused because she did not believe in herself to lead the Constituent Group. Later, the same thing happened when the next Chairperson of the Constituent Group became the Village Head. Finally, Laeli was directly elected to lead the Constituent Group.

"The members of the Constituent Group elect the leader directly, based on who gets the most votes. When the Village Head was elected, he said 'Replace me with Laeli' ... I wanted to be involved and

¹ **Authors:** Hening Wikan Sawiji and Wigke Capri Arti. **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.

become chairperson [of the group] because I was encouraged by fellow women.” (Laeli, East Lombok research village, 5 July 2019)

As a member and then leader of the Constituent Group, Laeli became a key actor in BaKTI’s work in the village and became closer with the BaKTI’s field staff. This relationship started when BaKTI began working with the village government. Later, Laeli forged strong collegial connections with them through discussions.

Laeli developed her skills and capacities by taking part in Constituent Group meetings that sought to develop women’s self-belief to express their opinions. She explains that to attract new members, she invites women to discuss together while learning to cook new dishes.

“We give invitations and have a village discussion. We often do this when there is a MAMPU [BaKTI] training, to make cakes or tomato sauce. We invite the community and then they start to understand. We take it in turns to invite twenty people, so it’s not just one person doing the inviting. If for instance, we contact Mba A. and say, ‘for this date can you invite 20 people to the constituent group.’ So, it’s not just monotone and always me doing the inviting, we swap.” (Laeli, East Lombok research village, 5 July 2019)

Laeli also took part in training for the drafting of the 2018 Village Regulation on the Protection of Women and Children. Her integral role in the drafting of the Village Regulation and articulating its content in public forums demonstrates her leadership skills. This Village Regulation provides women and children in the village with resources to respond to threats of domestic violence.

The Village Regulation also strengthened the Constituent Group’s role as a strategic partner of the village government to respond to and handle cases of domestic violence. The group was also guaranteed funds for the implementation of the Regulation. However, at the time of research, the Constituent Group’s proposed budget was yet to be approved.

Laeli thinks that she has experienced many changes since being in the Constituent Group and because of her personal relationships with BaKTI field staff. These changes have been both personal and social. Laeli now believes in herself more and is confident to express her thoughts in public forums. She also has greater awareness of difficulties faced by women in her community.

The network which Laeli has cultivated through this work has been crucial to the growth of her cracker business. BaKTI field staff introduced Laeli to the district government Social Office and Office of Corporations, Industries and Trade so she could process her business licence, which in turn would allow her to sell products in large stores. Subsequently, Laeli was also added to a WhatsApp chat group of small- and medium-sized business owners.

“[The changes have been] predominantly psychological. When we have lots of friends, we don’t feel like it’s hard. So, I believe in myself more. Recently, I have been communicating with the Office of Corporations, Industries and Trade. Then I was put in the [chat group] for small- and medium-sized businesses. I am better at speaking now, my way of thinking has been shaped. I’m not scared anymore to share what I feel. There are other changes too, sometimes I joke with the men, “watch out, yeah don’t be like this because there is a Village Regulation.” People share it mouth-to-mouth in the village. They are scared because there is the Village Regulation, scared the village will punish them.” (Laeli, East Lombok research village, 13 July 2019)

However, as time went by, Laeli began to feel burdened by her many roles in the community alongside managing her tofu and cracker businesses and being the only person to carry out all domestic work.

“Once I forgot to cook. Auntie [the person who sometimes helps around the house] didn’t come and didn’t tell me she wasn’t coming. I remember that December I had a full schedule. I was always chosen for PKK activities. In the month they had to spend the rest of their budget, so I kept getting invitations ... My child in pesantren always asked what does mum work as? She’s always going to training, even though she sells [tofu and crackers]. Mum goes to a meeting then sells, I explained and now they understand. Now my schedule isn’t too full.” (Laeli, East Lombok research village, 13 July 2019)

Laeli’s schedule was so busy for several years that it made her feel distant from her children. She plans to reduce the amount of activities she is involved in so that she has more time for her family and her business. Despite wanting a break from the Constituent Group, Laeli feels reluctant to leave the organisation which has changed her so much. The Constituent Group has helped her to speak in public and opened her eyes and heart to problems faced by women in her community.

Husnul

Village Constituent Group Member

East Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara¹

Husnul is fifty-two years old and a member of the Constituent Group in a village in East Lombok. She lives with her husband, daughter-in-law, and grandchildren. As a daughter, Husnul was taught to be responsible for looking after both her parents and her parents-in-law. She cared for her father and parents-in-law who were all ill before they passed away, washing, feeding and nursing them as well as taking care of her own small children.

Husnul's husband left for Malaysia shortly after they married, when she was pregnant with their first child. In Malaysia, her husband did not earn a proper wage and faced difficulties as an illegal migrant worker. Husnul tried to earn a livelihood for her family by sewing and embroidering as well as working as a cook at the community health post. Her husband regularly came home and, as a result, Husnul was pregnant every year or year and a half until they had five children together. These frequent pregnancies and lots of small children meant that she could not work a lot, even though it became more expensive to look after her expanding family. She also experienced health problems because of giving birth so frequently. In 2018, Husnul and her family turned a corner and started a business making banana and cassava crisps. While Husnul first started the business on a whim, it turned out that lots of people were interested in her products because of their unique flavour. The cracker business has become Husnul and her family's primary livelihood.

Since the 1990s, Husnul has been a Posyandu cadre and often helps villagers who need medical help. Her experience of caring for her parents made Husnul more aware about medical examinations and procedures than most villagers. Husnul first met BaKTI in a village discussion in 2014 as, at the time, she was the Head Cadre of the Posyandu.

Husnul then began to be actively involved in events on women's issues supported by BaKTI, including paralegal training about how to handle cases of violence, data-based policy advocacy, and the drafting of the 2018 Village Regulation on the Protection of Women and Children. She is active in participating in discussions about women migrant workers and efforts to reduce domestic violence in the village. Apart from these advocacy roles, Husnul also participated in a training workshop organised by the district Office of Corporations, Industry and Trade about financial management and commercial marketing. These activities gave her new insights and broadened her horizons.

"I also participated in corporate training about financial management and marketing. And I attended two training workshops about food management in food stalls. From BaKTI there was training about what happens when parents fight in front of their children and about paralegal work." (Husnul, East Lombok research village, 11 July 2019)

BaKTI also supported Husnul in her business endeavours. A BaKTI brochure features Husnul's banana and cassava crisps, and field staff introduced her to the Office of Corporations, Industry and Trade to assist her in licencing her business. This connection also led to Husnul being added to the district small- and medium- sized business chat group.

¹ **Authors:** Hening Wikan Sawiji and Wigke Capri. **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.

By participating in the training workshops, Husnul gained the self-belief to express her opinions in public and overcome her feelings of nervousness and embarrassment when addressing large forums. Now, Husnul writes down what she wants to say before sharing her opinion in these forums.

"Because after the discussion we were told to write and then present. So it is easier now to express my opinion and talk about women's issues ... We discussed problems in the village, migrant worker problems, the problem of domestic violence. Lots of my friends are still overseas workers. Like my friend who used to ask for food because she didn't have any and borrowed money from me. Now she is a migrant worker." (Husnul, East Lombok research village, 11 July 2019)

In the Constituent Group, Husnul is head of the Support Division. She has become a contact person for women, particularly from her hamlet, to talk about their problems. Husnul has natural social skills and finds it easy to get close with others and make women feel comfortable to talk about their personal problems. Although Husnul first thought that the problems women were telling her about were normal household disagreements, the paralegal course she took emphasised the importance of being a trusted person to talk to as the first step to address domestic violence, before documentation and mediation.

"I tell the Village Head and the go to Village Head. If someone is hurt, I used to take them first on a motorbike before we got an ambulance [in the village]." (Husnul, East Lombok research village, 11 July 2019)

In the political sphere, Husnul was invited to join the village Musrenbang because of her role as a Posyandu cadre and in the Constituent Group. In the forum, Husnul was confident to propose the acquisition of health equipment for the community health centre (Puskesmas) and an allocation from the Village Fund for the Posyandu.

"Yes, [I proposed the purchasing of] equipment for the Posyandu. We don't have complete data, or scales for pregnant women or a notice board for the Posyandu. During the Village Head's term, we got equipment to measure the height of babies and under-fives. All we need now are chairs and a table." (Husnul, East Lombok research village, 11 July 2019)

Husnul has seen changes in village women since the passing of the 2018 Village Regulation on the Protection of Women and Children. Women have become more forthright in explaining to men their rights and more vocal to counter the violence and neglect of women and children. This has also been the case in Husnul's own family. If her husband is violent toward her children, Husnul knows she will use the Village Regulation to protect her children and as a result, feels that she has a strong legal basis to warn her husband.

"Since the Village Regulation there are rarely cases of domestic violence, some are scared. Some used to hit their wives and was a woman who was hit until she was bruised. He was arrested by the police and in jail for a while. Once offenders paid five hundred thousand rupiah, they were let go. There was one who was only in jail for a day. But after the Village Regulation this rarely happens. Something is different. We can talk about it more feely, every time we meet ... There is also the [regulation on the] protection of children. My husband often hits our kids and I tell him he can't do it." (Husnul, East Lombok research village, 11 July 2019)

For Husnul, the primary needs of women in the village are access to courses and capital for businesses. Reflecting on her own experiences, Husnul feels fortunate that as a member of the PKK she has had access to government training workshops which were not open to all women in the village. In her view, if training and resources were open to everyone, then the village's standard of living would increase. She adds that village women also need to be supported to develop marketing skills and networks to promote their products.

When she started her crackers business, Husnul was treated with ridicule and scorn by some of her neighbours, particularly women who told her to just carry out her domestic chores. However, because of financial necessity and her determination, Husnul did not give up. She borrowed the tools she needed from neighbours and set up her business. After it grew, she even employed other women, particularly divorcees who live near her, to make taro chips together. Now, Husnul has even trademarked her crisp recipe.

“I pioneered these banana chips myself. When I started, there was an exhibition at the subdistrict PKK in 2018. I made the taro chips with a unique shape so they would be different from the others. [People said] “just look after your kids [at home].” But I tried to earn money for my family. My MAMPU friends helped me to find a sponsor. I accept all feedback, like at Santri Mart, I got ideas. I put all the suggestions I get into my products. A while ago a BaKTI community organiser said to me we [should] make taro crackers with [married] women and divorcees. We did it in a group and made cassava and taro crackers. I tried to continue it. So, I suggested, before I make my own business, how about we try to make these taro chips? How did we do it? I borrowed the tools from my neighbour.” (Husnul, East Lombok research village, 11 July 2019)

Husnul has recently become a formally recognised community leader as a member of the Village Consultative Council. She hopes that many men in the village will get involved in women’s empowerment and the protection of women and children. She even already has an idea for a course about caring about women’s issues for husbands and fathers. With such an initiative, women will no longer have to fight alone to change social norms which confine women to the domestic sphere and are used to justify violence.

Veronika

Head of the Fauana Women Farmers Group

North Central Timor, East Nusa Tenggara¹

Mama Veronika is forty-two-years-old and a courageous leader in her village in North Central Timor in East Nusa Tenggara. Since 2013, she has been active in women's empowerment activities as the Head of the Fauana Women's Farmers Group. Her involvement in prevention of violence against women and championing women's rights increased when the Amnaut Bife Kuan Association (YABIKU) entered the village and began to support the Women Farmers Group in 2014. Mama Veronika has persistently advocated for women's rights and against a perception of women which has been shaped by *adat* (customary) values and conservative interpretations of Catholicism.

"We want to change the perception, so that women will not always be shackled by patriarchal culture. We want women to be given opportunities and space to be more actively involved in the community. So that in the future women will have the same knowledge and experiences as men and can avoid violence." (Mama Veronika, East Nusa Tenggara research village, 30 June 2019)

Mama Veronika herself was once influenced by the social expectation that women primarily support their family and are obliged to carry out all the housework. But with education, Veronika's perception changed. She feels fortunate to have been born in a family which values education and that gave her a good understanding of the importance of female education and the fulfilment of women's rights. Veronika's family's support of her education is rare in the village, where in general families only support boys' education. Of her two siblings, Veronika was the only child given the opportunity to complete higher education and with the full support of her mum and at a family member's suggestion, completed a Diploma II in Primary School Teaching. Veronika also emphasises how her husband supported her to complete her diploma. In fact, she had made completing her diploma a condition of them getting married. She is one of three women in the village with higher education qualifications.

Mama Veronika thinks that school and higher education has opened doors of opportunity for her. She is a reliable community member and decision maker and is trusted as the Head of the Fauana Women Farmers Group since its establishment in 2013. In 2014, she also had the opportunity to further develop her skills when YABIKU entered the village. Veronika's husband did not agree with her desire to get involved in YABIKU's program as he thought that such public roles should be reserved for men only. Timorese *adat* organisations or bodies are usually only made up of men and very rarely include women, even for matters related to women's issues. Through perseverance and good communication, Veronika was able to change what her husband thought and successfully got his support to become active in the paralegal group.

This process took quite a long time as she shared the experiences and new knowledge she obtained about the importance of the organisation and how it worked toward justice for women. This approach increased her husband's understanding of her activities and eventually he supported her work with YABIKU.

"I told him that women are not like they were before. Women must be more active and participate in the community. I developed good communication with my husband. It was really important so I could get his

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support to do the activities I want to do.” (Mama Veronika, East Nusa Tenggara research village, 30 June 2019)

The activities she participated in, including discussions about gender equality, educating the community about violence against women, and training in women’s leadership with YABIKU, all contributed to Veronika becoming more active and helping women in her village. She also feels that Yohana, YABIKU’s founder, inspired her to develop her capacities.

“Yohana proves that when women are given training and broad education and opportunities to advocate, then we can produce change. It’s true that it might not happen immediately. It needs a long time, but Yohana proves that women can do it.” (Mama Veronika, East Nusa Tenggara research village, 30 June 2019)

Veronika is the Head of the Fauana Women’s Farmers Group, after being chosen by its members, even though she has suggested on multiple occasions that she be replaced. Fauana Women’s Farmers Group is one of three Women Farmers Groups that are active in the village, while there are ten others which are not currently active. Nearly all villagers agree that leadership is key to the success of these groups. Members of the Fauana Women Farmers Group believe that Veronika is a young and courageous leader who is assertive and protects her group’s members. She cares deeply about all its members.

“We unanimously elected Mama Veronika as Head because she is a courageous person who can talk in public. We are also pleased because Veronika is a really good person and not angry when she talks to us who don’t feel like we can do anything.” (Member of the Fauana Women Farmers Group, East Nusa Tenggara research village, 1 July 2019)

Mama Veronika is a leader who always focuses on developing herself and putting her community first. At the beginning of her leadership, Veronika found it hard to manage her time and did not feel confident in her public speaking abilities. But gradually, after she participated in YABIKU’s public speaking and leadership training, Veronika felt more confident. She also is a proactive person and determined to learn, so she often asked questions in training sessions and then put into practice what she had learned in the group. This knowledge transfer developed and led to the success of the Fauana Women Farmers Group.

“Veronika is someone who when she went to our training, immediately put into practice what she had learned in the group. That’s why the Fauana Women Farmers Group has progressed so much further than the other groups. They are determined to make progress.” (YABIKU Staff Member, Kefamenanu, 4 July 2019)

As well as the Head of the Women Farmers Group, Veronika is also secretary and a victim of violence support companion in the Village Paralegal Group. Veronika and ten community representatives also took part in YABIKU paralegal training in 2015 in Kefamenanu. This training aimed to prepare the Village Paralegal Group to offer support for victims of violence and, through it, Veronika gained basic paralegal and counselling skills and procedures for handling cases of domestic violence.

One of Veronika’s largest achievements as a member of the Paralegal Group was when she had to respond to a case of violence involving her own family. Veronika upheld her sense of integrity, professional competence, and commitment to women’s safety. She paid no attention to the pressure from her family to not report the violence.

“When the perpetrator was in my family, my position was clear. I explained to my family that it must be handled by and reported to the police. These actions cannot be hidden and cannot be handled by the family. If the violence has happened multiple times and the woman has been hit a lot, then it has to be immediately reported to the police.” (YABIKU Staff Member, Kefamenanu, 4 July 2019)

The severity of the victim’s injuries in this case shocked the village. Mama Veronika and other members of the paralegal group were fearless in helping bring this case to court. They monitored the perpetrator and were determined to oversee the case until it was fully finished. When Mama Veronika was told that the perpetrator had reoffended, the paralegal members decided to try other methods to deter him.

“We bought a new phone card and at night we would call him. His wife had told us that he usually hit her at night before they went to sleep. The violence happened at night. So, with the new number, we called them like we were the police. We asked him where he was and reminded him to not commit any violence. After we called two or three times, he was scared and didn’t want to do it anymore.” (Mama Veronika, Kupang, 11 July 2019)

With the other paralegal members, Mama Veronika was able to oversee this case from beginning to end. She feels very proud that she was able to deter this perpetrator and emphasises how even if perpetrators are in one’s family, there must be no tolerance for violence against women.

“I thought I am a paralegal. Justice has to be upheld, what’s wrong is wrong and what is right has to be defended. That means I will not defend the perpetrator, even though he is in my family. I am on the victim’s side and will prioritise the victim because there has to be justice.” (Mama Veronika, Kupang, 11 July 2019)

Mama Veronika explains that she felt proud to be part of the discussions and training workshops with YABIKU. Every day she becomes more determined to put her knowledge to work to help and protect women in her village.

“I am proud. I am proud because I have gained knowledge and experience. And proud to be able to help other people, particularly women to handles cases [of violence]. Before being involved with YABIKU I thought that it [domestic violence] was normal, but now after I gained knowledge and skills from training, I am proud that I can help.” (Mama Veronika, East Nusa Tenggara research village, 30 June 2019)

Veronika’s eldest daughter, Vania, says that since her mother became active with YABIKU, the division of work at home has changed drastically. Now, Veronika’s husband and son help her with household chores.

“When Mum comes home from YABIKU training workshops, she likes bringing books and notes. Usually, Mum tells me to read them too, that’s how I’ve learned about gender equality. Mum has also started to apply it at home.” (Vania, East Nusa Tenggara research village, 10 July 2019)

Veronika thinks that her journey to develop herself and advocate for women still has a long way to go. She continues to work toward the promise of women’s empowerment and advocate to the village government. Veronika often asks officials directly about the progress of women’s empowerment programs and funds. She further demonstrated her leadership skills as the Head of the District Paralegal Group.

Mama Veronika dreams of becoming the first female Village Head. She is sure that her village will have many female leaders in the future. Although the journey to break through patriarchal cultural norms and social structures will be difficult, she is determined to keep working to uphold and improve the dignity of women in the village.

Yohana

YABIKU Founder and Former District Parliament Member
North Central Timor, East Nusa Tenggara¹

In discussions about violence against women and women's empowerment in North Central Timor, one name nearly always emerges: Yohana. Yohana is the founder of the Amnaut Bife Kuan Association. Since 1999, she has been working in women's empowerment with YABIKU, and from 2014 to 2019 she served as a member of the North Central Timor House of Representatives and led the formation of District Regulation on the Implementation of the Protection of Women and Children. Yohana – or Mama Yohana as she is known – has a deep connection to Timorese women and feels that there is still so much more which needs to be done to improve their welfare.

Mama Yohana's motivation to join the women's movement began when she was in high school. As her father worked as Head of the Service Division at the State Detention Centre, Yohana frequently interacted with female prisoners. This shaped her understanding of the problems which led to women being imprisoned. In many cases, Yohana found out that women were not the primary perpetrators of violence, but rather victims of violence.

“By the time I was in high school I understood and had found some cases in which women committed violence, but not because they wanted to. They committed violence because they took out their uncontrollable emotions on her husband. Women live under pressure because of their husbands who cheat, get drunk, and don't provide for their families. From their stories I knew that they were actually victims of exploitation.” (Yohana, Kefamenanu, 26 June 2019)

These interactions with women at the detention centre inspired Yohana to work for women in North Central Timor who feel oppressed, so much so that this sometimes results in violence. Yohana understood how Timorese women were burdened with societal expectations and economic and cultural burdens. After seeing the suffering experienced by women, Yohana wanted to help them and ease their burdens.

When, in 1999, thousands sought refuge in North Central Timor from Timor Leste, Yohana joined as a volunteer in the West Timor Humanitarian Team, together with Oxfam Australia, to help women and children in refugee barracks. She worked to support refugees and always tried to be their friend. After working together in the program for two years, many women asked Yohana to advocate against the violence they experienced. This is how YABIKU was born.

In 2000, Yohana established YABIKU with friends and started supporting women victims of violence: “Yabiku was my dream. This organisation is for women and children, to improve their welfare” (Kefamenanu, 26 June 2019). In 2001, YABIKU was officially established and was recognised and recommended by the district government.

YABIKU has worked for the empowerment and protection of women and children for nearly fifteen years. Under Yohana's leadership, YABIKU prioritised advocating and supporting women and children victims of violence. At the same time, through this work Yohana and YABIKU began to realise the necessity of pushing for pro-women policies to create structural change.

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“We reflected from our journey that we can’t just come in to handle cases, it has to start from prevention.” (Yohana, Kefamenanu, 26 June 2019)

YABIKU then began to advocate and form strategies to influence policy. To do so, YABIKU began to build networks with policy makers to give them an appetite for producing pro-women policies.

“I saw that YABIKU was already twelve years old. I felt that I trusted my friends in the organisation. So, with their approval, I wanted to leave the front line and enter parliament.” (Yohana, Kefamenanu, 26 June 2019)

Yohana experienced difficulties in getting through to and shaping policy makers decisions. This motivated her to run for parliament and continue the struggle for women’s rights from within. One of Yohana’s dreams was to create a gender responsive budget, so it could inspire pro-women policies.

This was the starting point of Yohana’s journey to nominate for the North Central Timor House of Representatives. She competed in two elections. The first was in 2009, but she failed to win a seat, for factional political games and Yohana’s position as a woman were not in her favour. Then, she tried for the second time in 2014 and successfully was elected.

Yohana was then selected to become the Head of Commission C because of her a strong education background and knowledge about how to prepare the District Budget and District Regulations. This was an important steppingstone to fulfill her dreams of formulating pro-women policies.

“I felt so lucky to have an NGO background. I had already learned how to put together the budget and back District Regulation with YABIKU. So, while others were learning for the first time, I already understood and knew how to do it. That was my advantage, when I entered parliament, I wasn’t a blank slate at all. I was well prepared.” (Yohana, Kefamenanu, 26 June 2019)

Yohana explains that bargaining for a leadership position was very difficult. She had to fight to get through to lots of male members of parliament, especially as there were only two other female members. This made Yohana work hard to make friends with and influence these two other women.

“Frankly speaking, getting to a leadership position is very difficult, and we have to fight to get through the many men, and there were only two other female members. I first tried to influence my friend, one of the women by motivating her to work for women. I said, ‘we are from different factions and parties, but we are both women. So, we have to be able to do something for women.’” (Yohana, Kefamenanu, 26 June 2019)

During her time in office, Yohana relied both on her skills and personal networks. She tried to demonstrate her skills in small forums, to prove herself as a strong competitor. Capitalising on this support and opportunity, Yohana began to formulate District Regulations on the Implementation of the Protection of Women and Children. Throughout its history, the North Central Timor House of Representatives had never before produced a single district regulation initiative on the protection of women and children. To make this dream a reality, Yohana tried to become a spokesperson and influence all factions through a personal approach.

With YABIKU, Yohana formed a strategy and collaborated with other NGOs to get a public hearing at the House of Representatives to produce the District Regulation on the Protection of Women and Children. It was here that MAMPU’s partners and Oxfam played an important role in advocating to the District House of Representatives that this regulation be realised. Yohana advocated for gender-sensitive district regulations

and was responsible for the technical drafting of the District Regulation with the District House of Representatives. At the same time, YABIKU and other partners focused on strengthening support for the District Regulation on the Protection of Women and Children at the grassroots level. YABIKU gathered support and prepared the community for this policy change, while Yohana lobbied members of the North Central Timor political elite.

“A year after I was inaugurated, I often bothered other members by talking about initiatives for regulations. In the history of the North Central Timor House of Representatives, it has never produced an initiative at all. So, I tried to be a funnel to influence all the factions through personal relationships. And then I held events to gather all the politicians and my friends from women’s NGOs to discuss a district regulation on the protection of women and children.” (Yohana, Kefamenanu, 26 June 2019)

Finally, the District Government passed the two regulations which Yohana had initiated and YABIKU supported: District Regulation No. 14 2016 on the Protection of Women and District Regulation No. 15 2016 on the Protection of Children. Both regulations relate to preventative measures to protect women and children from violence, as well as handling and protection of women and children after they have experienced violence.

Yohana hopes that the two district regulations can protect women and children from violence. These two district regulations have created a significant deterrent to perpetrating violence. The government community education about these regulations included explaining that acts of domestic violence cannot be tolerated and outlining the punishments for perpetrators of such violence. This district regulation is thus like a shield for women. Conversely, for potential perpetrators of violence, the district regulation classified these acts of violence as a crime and this has made men more reluctant to offend. Seeing these changes has made Yohana proud and eager to continue to fight for women's rights.

2019 was Yohana’s final year as a member of the House of Representatives. She stood for re-election for another five-year term but was unsuccessful. Nevertheless, Yohana states that she was not scared to leave her position as a Member of Parliament as because of her personal approach and the relationships she has built, she will continue to be active in the North Central Timor women’s movement and fight for pro-women and children policies.

Yohana is an example of how politicians and women’s activists advocate for and with women. As a Member of Parliament, she never forgot her constituents and the village women YABIKU supports. In fact, she often spends her own money to help women in villages and uses her network with government agencies to provide them with assistance. Many women from villages also come and visit her at her house in Kefamenanu city. Going forward, Yohana will always work for Timorese women.

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