



# JASS

*Strengthening & sustaining  
women's organizing power*

JASS-Southeast Asia  
**Raising Women's Political Awareness**  
Nias Island, North Sumatra, Indonesia



Teluk Dalam & Gunung Sitoli, Nias, Indonesia  
April 6 – 7, 2009

On 6 and 7 April 2009, Berliana Purba & Dina Lumbantobing of PESADA and Niken Lestari of JASS SEA held two workshops. The first, in Teluk Dalam, the capital of South Nias, involved 69 women and 6 men, while the second, in Gunung Sitoli, the capital of Nias Induk, involved 50 women and 2 men.

The two workshops aimed to provide women living in rural areas and in the two small towns with information about gender issues in politics and about the importance of women's representation in the Legislative Council as well as about leadership in general. This activity was associated with the Indonesian Legislative Election held on 9 April 2009.

### **Context**

Women's and gender issues in politics, and even in general, are relatively new in Nias. As with other ethnic groups in North Sumatra, patriarchy in Nias is very strong. Moreover, Nias is situated far off the main island of Sumatra and the local government is considered very corrupt. South Nias, in fact, is the poorest regency in North Sumatra.

As workshop debates revealed, it was impossible to discuss some political cases openly, including the death of a journalist who had tried to reveal corruption cases; the immunity of the regent who can not be sent to court; and areas where the ruling Democrat Party controlled the voting administration system.

Corruption in South Nias has been proven. This was one of three areas that had to repeat the election because of fraud. The news media report that the members of the General Elections Commission of South Nias are likely to be replaced. By the time this report was written, the number of elected local legislators had not been determined because of problematic counting. So, out of 245 female candidates running for legislative seats in Nias Induk and South Nias, the number elected candidates had not been ascertained.

### **Teluk Dalam Workshop**

The participants were extremely varied. Women represented organizations such as PESADA Women's Credit Union, faith-based institutions (both Christian and Muslim), and Bhayangkari (association of policemen's wives). Some female students also attended.



*Some women from the police wives organization (Bhayangkari) involved actively in Teluk Dalam*

The workshop began with a short introduction of participants to one another. Then, together they sang a song entitled “*Perempuan Merdeka*” (Independent Woman) to build an energetic atmosphere. The next session was given to the presenters. The first presentation was delivered by Mrs. Sitasi Zagoto MS, a lecturer living in Teluk Dalam. She talked about women in Nias culture, emphasizing the difficulties that Nias women face in connection with their positions in the custom/tradition and with access to education and health service. According to Mrs. Zagoto, ignorance and poverty are two sides of a coin that cannot be separated. Only with education, are women able to find solutions to come out of poverty.

Dina Lumbantobing continued the session with a presentation concerning women and their political rights. She highlighted the small number of women occupying public office, especially in the parliament of Nias. In Indonesia, North Sumatra is one of nine provinces that do not have female representatives in the DPD (Regional Representative Council). The data also shows that from the first election in 1955 up to 2004, the composition of female members in the Legislative Council of Indonesia ranges between 5.9% (1955) and 12.4% (1992).

The discussion in Teluk Dalam was quite animated and active. The participants expressed their pessimism about the quality of the 2009 election. Going by their experiences in 2004, they could sense some indications of “*Serangan Fajar*” (buying off the voters in the early morning of the voting day); fraud in the Official Report, in terms of both manipulation of the reported number of votes and signing of the Official Report prior to the Election time; the possibility of voters being allowed to vote in more than one voting site. They were even suspicious that election officials were not allowed to report any deviation.

Some participants doubted that women could obtain seats in the Local Legislative Council. Below are some of their statements:

- *Our custom restricts us so tightly. Men are more important in Nias society. In fact, there is a special term “Amaga obala”, meaning Father is God.*
- *A female candidate who has a brother also running for a legislative seat was advised by her whole family to give up. They said, “You’re a Nias, and in our tradition, we place a man first. We want you to cancel your nomination and support your brother.” But she was not willing to quit, saying “I like this activity, I feel stronger. Although my brother and I are from different parties and our family warned us. But I believe women support me.”*
- *Actually, we are pessimistic about this election. We are a bit desperate. We know exactly how it will end because we have been instructed who we must for and we also hear that the BAP (Official Report) has already been made and signed before the voting. So what is this election? KPU (General Elections Commission) of South Nias is being taken into court because it has systematically manipulated the voting results.*

### **Gunung Sitoli Workshop**

Here, the workshop was a bit different. Fewer participants joined because they were afraid of being accused of attending an illegal campaign. Berliana Purba and Rosilina Gulo (field staff of PESADA Nias) gave a presentation about voter education since the local election in Dairi Regency and Nias Island. Participants in this town were not as brave as those in Teluk Dalam. They became very anxious when one of the PESADA team told the truth about the regent of Nias being in favor of the ruling party (Democrat Party) and said that they sensed a strong indication that the election was being manipulated managed to make this party win. Some participants denied this allegation, and almost walked out of the discussion.

Among interesting points during the Gunung Sitoli workshop were a heated debate between students and legislator candidates of Local Legislative Council; women’s doubts about determining their choices; and suggestions relating to the leadership in Nias PESADA.

- *A high school teacher was not comfortable with the discussion about female legislative candidates. She said, “Actually, I support female candidates, they have power. But because my husband is also running for the legislative seat,*

*whatever people say, I have to vote for my husband.” Listening to this, everyone shouted, “Huuuuuu ....” (showing disagreement).*

- *A female student who was still very young said, “We can support female candidates. But I want to ask whether your households are well managed. How do you work in the Legislative House and manage your households at the same time? Remember, household work is women’s destiny. Moreover, many young women go in and out of the cafes along the Nias beach; it is due to lack of care from their families.” (A female legislative candidate responded to these questions with assistance from PESADA. The candidate expressed her disappointment at the student’s way of thinking, explaining that women should be able to negotiate their roles in the family and share duties with the husband. These questions should be asked not only to women.)*
- *“It’s too late for you to do this activity. We have already been strictly controlled by tradition and influenced by political parties. It is difficult for us to move. Next time, make such activity again and involve women as many as possible.”*
- *“We hear that coordinator of Nias PESADA is a male. If possible, we demand that Nias PESADA be led by a woman not a man.”*



*Points for discussion (power point) and ballot paper for role play – Gunung Sitoli*

## **Media**

This workshop program was covered in a news program broadcast by the RRI (Indonesian Broadcasting Radio). As the PESADA team in Nias was interviewed on radio about the workshops, they indirectly and carefully expressed the participants’ pessimism about the quality of the election. However, the statement that they had

prepared could not be aired because the radio considered it as a campaign. They had produced a circular, in collaboration with the Female Activist Network of North Sumatra, to persuade people to participate in supervising the election. Despite the lobbying that they had done, they were unable to release the content of the circular.



*Interview by local radio (state radio – the only station and very popular in Nias Island) directly after the workshop finished.*

### **Concerns about Elections**

Many views were expressed during the two workshops, both about problems and about expectations of female legislative candidates.

- a. Problems relating to the leadership and female legislators in Nias:
  - Lack of knowledge about the vision and missions of the legislative candidates
  - Not knowing who the female candidates are
  - Limited time
  - Inadequate education
  - Lack of funds
  - Lack of trust in women
- b. Problems in the election:
  - Lack of responsiveness to the needs of illiterate people
  - Money politics
  - The absence of C4 invitation
  - Sick voters (members of voting committee should come to homes of the sick)
  - The plan of '*serangan fajar*' (buying off voters in the early morning before they come to vote)
  - One person able to vote in more than one voting site
  - Fraud in the making of the Official Report

- c. Expectations of female legislative candidates:
  - Not to be self-interested and to consider poor and marginalized people
  - To keep considering women's prosperity
  - Not to forget their vision and missions
  - To show themselves capable of leading
  - To be sensible leaders
  - Not to shoot their mouths off
  - To be honest and able to improve the dignity of women in the public
- d. Commitment to the female legislative candidates
  - To pray for their success
  - To convince other people to vote for female candidates
  - To vote for female candidates, regardless of their political parties
- e. Commitment to action
  - To persuade women to vote for female candidates
  - To conduct shadow monitoring
  - To report any cheating to PANWASLU (Election Supervisory Commission)
  - To text message (SMS) PESADA if PANWASLU does not respond

The workshop closed with an evaluation, which in general concluded that such workshops are very important and must be followed up so that women gain further awareness of politics.



*Group discussion in Teluk Dalam, building commitment to vote for women*