

Outreach Development of Indonesia's Outlying Areas



Families in Women's Hands

Stories of female heads of families are rare, in particular when they, are single parents, single providers, living in some of Indonesia's outlying and remote areas. The odds are often against them—lower wages than men and the stigma of being a janda (divorcee or widow) affecting their efforts at finding work or getting loans. Many of them have little or no knowledge of their rights and are often on the losing end, on issues like divorce or physical abuse. Yet they survive, determined to give their children the chance of a life better than theirs' Tempo English Edition reports on how single women parents cope in West Nusa Tenggara, East Flores, and West Kalimantan.



LAMINAH'S routine starts every day at Bam by feeding the fish in her fish basket at the edge of the Ainjeli river. In the 4 x 1.5-meter bamboo basket, some 2,000 red, white and black ikan nila (Nile tilapia *Oreochromis niloticus*) stir up a storm as they gorge themselves on breakfast. "When they're full, they go back down to the bottom again," explained the 32 year-old Laminah.

Laminah has been farming fish for a number of years, and has benefited significantly from it. In the hamlet where she lives in Sandongan, Lingsar district, West Lombok regency, Laminah has managed to build a solid 50-square meter house with walls made of blocks. "It's the first time a woman can buy a house," she said quoting a praise from a man in her village.

Such independence did not just appear overnight. Previously, Laminah would never have been brave enough to set foot outside the house. Being a divorcee is not easy in Sandongan. "If a divorcee went out dressed in nice clothes, women would accuse them of being after their husbands," she recalled. Laminah was left to fend for herself after her husband, Edi, a construction laborer, divorced her to marry another woman. Traditionally, women in Lingsar earned less than men. As a result, widows, single mothers and abandoned wives were forced to eke out a living as best they could.

This greatly worried Siti Zamraini Alauthi, or Reni, 36, the coordinator of Pekka (Female Heads of House holds Empowerment) NGO, who saw that women in Lingsar could only find employment picking or carrying fruit in the big plantations. "I was very concerned that they can only work for other people as labor," Reni said.

In 2003, Reni started to introduce the concept of empowerment to local women by forming women's associations, promoting micro-finance, conducting adult literacy activities, and promoting women's rights. The women's association initially met with a lot of hostility. "The men used the joke that women were only good for 'fertilizer'," Laminah recalled. In Lingsar society, this connotes that women are only good for being sold, or in other words a woman is little more than a commodity.

The women themselves also had their doubts. Rani had to work unceasingly for four months until the association was up and running. "We started out with only 10 women," said Laminah. She recalled that many of them were also suspicious at the outset. "Some of them thought they were going to be kidnapped," she said. She also recalled that she was afraid when she saw for the first time women wearing trousers as women in Lingsar had never worn trousers previously.

During the association's first meetings, Reni encouraged the women to start putting aside small amounts of money between Rp500 and Rp1,000 a week or even a month, depending on the circumstances of each member. The core lesson imparted by Reni was that one needs to be able to save before borrowing.

Laminah decided to join the association after receiving the support of the head of her hamlet. When she realized what the association's goals were, she began to feel very much at home. "I was also pleased to see that there were people who trusted and were concerned for me," she said.

As the association's funds grew, Reni started to encourage the ladies to develop their own businesses. Laminah, who frequently complained about a lack of appreciation for her work as a fish feeder, was persuaded by Reni to set up her own small aquaculture enterprise.

Laminah admitted that she was uneasy at the beginning. "I hated having debts," she said. To strengthen Laminah's self-confidence, Reni provided all the support she needed, including drawing up a financial plan. With start-up capital of Rp2 million, Laminah bought a large fish basket for Rp700,000, with the rest being spent on fish fry and feed.



Keeping her fish-farming business going was not easy, especially given that the sector is dominated by men in Lingsar. But Laminah persevered and prospered in the end. At one stage she was the proud owner of seven fish cages, each of which earned her a profit of Rp.1.5 million every three months. She also helped her sisters set up in the business.

Sadly, four of her cages were destroyed by floods some time ago. However, Laminah was not going to give up easily. Two months ago, she started keeping 35 hens, and also took a hand at selling kerosene and cell phone top up cards. "The men don't tease us any more after seeing how many women have made a success of themselves," she said smiling.

Despite these successes, single-parent women in Lingsar continue to face many difficulties in upholding their legal rights. The most common problem is lack of a marriage certificate. "Many of the men think that a woman's place is in the kitchen so that there's no need for a marriage certificate," Laminah said. Another problem is that most divorced women lack divorce certificates. "The vast majority of the women don't know they have the right to marital assets if they are divorced," Laminah added.

But the women of Lingsar regency are clearly made of sterner stuff, and are not going to be easily forced back into the kitchen. Musinah, 35, is a widowed mother of two children. She is an active member of Pekka and has learned to read and write since she joined the association. "I'm now teaching other ladies," she said. She had only attended elementary school as far as grade three and since then had forgotten all she had ever learned. As a result, she was also numerically illiterate. Now, however, Musinah teaches reading and writing to her fellow association members on the veranda of her house.

Her in-depth knowledge of women's empowerment led to Musinah being sent to Jakarta to take part in a weeklong video production course. With her camera, Musinah then made a film titled Geger Brajah on adult literacy education. The result? "Now we have more ladies signing up for reading and writing classes than we can cope with."

The use of visual aides such as videos and photographs is considered a particularly effective method of promoting women's empowerment. Take, for example, the experience of Sri Asmani in Jonggat village, Central Lombok. After receiving training in photography, Sri set about documenting the women's empowerment program in her village. Her photographs show how traditionally the role of women in her village was confined to the kitchen.

Reni has carefully recorded the successes of all of her "students" "From the psychological and self-reliance perspectives, our empowerment efforts in Lingsar have been very successful." One-third of Pekka members in Lingsar now have their own businesses. although this of course does not mean that their financial worries are at an end. "But at least we can be thankful that their outlooks have changed. What they now need is management training," explained Reni.

One indicator of success is the physical appearance of the women. "During formal meetings, the ladies are dressed up and look great. I hardly recognize them," Reni said.

West Nusa Tenggara provincial Women's Empowerment Agency Director Ratningdiah commented. "More than 20 percent of the women in West Nusa Tenggara are single parents and earn barely enough to survive on." This is why, she said, that she warmly welcomed empowerment initiatives of the sort pioneered by Reni.

Ratningdiah said that she wanted to see her agency play a bigger role in reducing illiteracy, domestic violence, and people trafficking, and increasing the number of women legislators. "Unfortunately, budgets are not allocated on a gender-sensitive basis," she said.

This is what Kamsinah, 39, wants to change. Hailing from Adobala village, Adonara, East Nusa Tenggara, Kaminsah is teaching women about how the local government budgeting process works. "The ladies in this village are now brave enough to voice their opinions at village meetings, even if sometimes no heed is paid to them," she said. Kamsinah is not willing to accept decisions handed down by the local government just like that. "If people are taught how the political system works, they will be able to play a concrete role in helping formulate local government policy," she explained to Tempo.

Speaking Out in Adonara

Practical political training makes women in Adonara, East Flores, dare to make their voices heard at hearings with the Regional House of Representatives, and they also learn to study the regional budget.



The debate one morning was pretty tough at the village of Adobala, Klubagolit subdistrict, on the Island of Adonara, East Flores. The theme of the discussion was integrated health service post (posyandu). Those taking part in the deliberations were women and men of the entire village of Adobala. Reading from a heavily-scribbled piece of paper, Petronela Masi Suban, 40, raised her hand to offer a suggestion. "I

want every resident to be involved. The funding should be well-planned, and that every villager can look at it," she said outspokenly.

Public speaking is Masi's new experience. "I was tongue-tied before a large audience," she told Tempo last week. Lna Masi-in a is the local word for mother-feels confident appearing in public after following the program in political science training in Adonara since 2008.

First, she was interested in taking up this program because she wanted to become the village chief. "It turns out that this training gives me lots of knowledge," she said laughing. At first Masi's life revolved around the house and the garden-as customarily done by Adonara women. Now she actively leads a small enterprise (UKM) for ikat woven products in her village.

The transformation in Masi and other women in Adonara is inseparable from the role of Kamsinah, 39. Popularly called In a Boleng, Kamsinah actively gives simple practical political training. "Many people say political science is intended solely for rich people, and because we're poor it is not necessary." According to her, a moderate understanding of practical political science is mandatory for the people so as to enable them to correct any deviant local government policies."

Since December 2002, Kamsinah joined Adonara's non-governmental organization, the Female Heads of Households Empowerment (PEKKA). One of its agendas is managing Adonara's savings & loan cooperative. For this purpose the women must master arithmetic and writing skill. They have to record in the book every PEKKA activity. Kamsinah makes arrangements for literate women to teach the still-illiterate ones.

Late in 2007, she received political science training from the central PEKKA in Jakarta. Returning to Adonara, Kamsinah made a similar program. About 50 women actively follow the training program until completion. "There were even pupils who have to write on the floor due to the limited number of desks," said Kamsinahto Tempo.

The curriculum is simple. The learning method is adjusted to the participant's ability. Ina Masi said that they learn to study the regional budget (APBD). The participants are also invited to attend public hearings with the East Flores Regional House of Representatives (DPRD) in mid-2010.

Ina Masi and her peers expect to be able to attend such an event again and to make proposals in a hearing with the East Flores DPRD in February 2011. "We hear that the local government agrees to provide Rp.54 million to assist the PEKKA educational programs," said Masi.

Maria Goretti Tokan, 42, a member of the East Flores DPRD, said the women's activities are very interesting to follow. Besides the strong network, according to Etty as Maria Gorreti is fondly called-they are also economically trained. The mother of a son referred to the savings & loan activity which Adonara PEKKA members engage in. "The savings is re-empowered by incorporating them into the weaving business, opening of a kiosk, and gardening," she said.

The Adobala-born Etty affirmed that the community of Adonara is culturally patriarchal: males are always more dominant in decision making. The women's life on the entire island is limited to behind-the-scenes activity. With practical political education, Etty expects the women's voice on the island to be taken into more consideration in the future.

Agreeing with Etty, Kamsinah said, "Today, the women are already brave to speak up in every village meeting." Even though she admitted that occasionally the proposals made by the women are completely ignored. The young woman is determined that she will never stop at only assisting the women folks. What is Kamsinah's next goal? She intends to get more young people aged 20-39 to become involved in the equal education program which has now entered its second year. In between the equality program, "We insert practical political education," said Kamsinah enthusiastically.

Protecting the village with a camera

Armed with digital cameras, some older women were assigned as village development supervisors. They obtained their photography skills through serious training.



The incident took place in March 2009. A young woman attended the inauguration of a new school building in her village. Like a professional photographer, Kurnia Puspita Sari-the young woman-began recording the entire event on her camera. This 26-year-old is a member of PEKKA (Female Heads of Households Empowerment) in Wajok Hilir village, Kee Siantan district, Pontianak, West Kalimantan.

While she was eagerly focusing on the ribbon-cutting, she was suddenly rudely shoved by a television reporter. Her camera almost fell. Kurnia got angry. The reporter said that she was getting in the way of the television crew.

This was not the first time she had such an unpleasant experience. She went through the same thing when she first started her assignment to document development activities in her village or district. Many suspected that Kurnia was a professional reporter who was trying to dig up bad news. She slowly and patiently began to approach the people involved in carrying out the development. In the end she was able to start getting a better response. Access to information improved as well, making it easier for her to do her photography assignment well.

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A group of women learning how to use a camera and take pictures.

"The public knows me better now. Photography has become a hobby," said Kurnia to Tetmpo last week. After joining the PEKKA Foundation, Kurnia was assigned to use photography to monitor the implementation of the Mandiri National Community Empowerment Program (PNPM Mandiri). Armed with a digital camera, she and other women are called on to photograph various PNPM Mandiri activities in their villages. The photos they take can be seen from their viewpoint of female heads of households who are often discredited by the community.

Before being sent into the field as "shutterbugs," these women are trained for a month about the basics of photography. "It is not too difficult to use a digital camera," Kurnia explained. Indirectly, these women are also introduced to various PNPM Mandiri activities. Nani Zulminarni, Chairwoman of the PEKKA National Secretariat, said that she is proud of the activities of these amateur photographers.

According to Nani, photography has long been a part of the empowerment process for female heads of families. The result? Nani said that they do not just take photos with development themes, such as roads or buildings, but emphatically present a common thread about women's empowerment. She cited the photographic works of Sri Asmani from Jonggat village, Central Lombok, as an example.

Sri actively photographs meetings held in her village. From her work it can clearly be seen that the role of women is just to prepare food and beverages for the men at the meetings. She gave these photos of the women's food preparation activity in the village meetings the title of "Women Still in the Kitchen".

On October 20 the photos taken by these women were published by PNPM Mandiri and the PEKKA Foundation in a book entitled *Behind the Lens*.

What benefits have they felt as photographers? For Kurnia, there is a feeling of pride and inner satisfaction for having done her duty as a photographer. "There has been a very good response to my photos, and the community now knows more about the development activities which are going on or have already been completed in their area," she ardently stated. This was ever truer after the book *Behind the Lens* was sent to each village. In

addition to being a memento, the book is intended to motivate communities to increase the spirit of mutual cooperation in village development.

The Voice of Independent Women

PHOTOGRAPHING Indonesia for almost 25 years, I've always asked on each journey: "Is Indonesia's natural beauty and the population's hospitality directly proportional to its welfare?" I asked the same question when I visited Lingsar village, some 30 kilometers from Senggigi Beach on Lombok Island.



At Lingsar, I wanted to observe local women's struggle to get out of poverty. Their story has earned the admiration of local and international communities.

Joining the Female Heads of Households Empowerment (PEKKA) program, these mighty women direct their families and children themselves. The death of spouses and divorces have led them to a world of no choice: serving as single parents.



In Lingsar their voices resound, winning sympathy. They are actively saving, doing Business, founding village banks. Their Organization have got legal status. Their story has been reported in newspapers.



Now, when tourists visit Lombok, it offers a new "panorama" no less beautiful – apart from gorgeous and External beaches. It's the view of independent women who are yelling loudly, "United women are indomitable!"