

## **Indonesia Case Study by Nani Zulminarni, JASS National Coordinator, Indonesia**

Census data from 2007 shows that around 13.6% of households in Indonesia – about 8 million households – are headed by women. Their existence is not recognised: in law only husbands or men are defined as heads of household, and popular social opinion almost never consider women to be household heads. As a result, women heads of household are subordinated, generally very poor, and face multiple social and political discriminations. This is made worse by their general acceptance of injustice as part of their destiny, something a lack of knowledge and education plays into, and the negative stereotypes of them within society which makes it difficult for them to become independent and develop themselves.

In 2001 JASS started a programme called PEKKA (women headed households empowerment programme), which aims to strengthen women heads of household so that they can contribute to building a more prosperous, democratic, just and dignified society. Up to 2009 Pekka has worked with 430 grassroots organisations of women heads of household (these organisations are also called Pekka) in 8 provinces of Indonesia. Pekka members are generally between 20-60 years old, of whom almost 40% are illiterate and have never been to school. They have up to 6 dependents and work in the informal sector, for instance as farm labourers and small traders. Income as low as \$1/day is common,, and many of them have experienced both domestic and state violence in some form.

Working with such groups is very challenging as they face multiple problems. Our organisation process begins with building their collective dreams and visions, which involves facilitating the group to reflect on their current position consciously and clearly. This is done in a workshop, during which the women explore their current condition, position and status in the social and political systems, and begin to explore the power that shapes their lives. From this we facilitate them in formulating a vision of their future condition, position and status.

This process involves three key phases: taking a picture of their own life, mapping their position in the social and political structure, and formulating their mutual dreams and goals. Sometimes these are done as three 90-minute sessions in one day, and sometimes in two or three separate meetings, depending on the condition and availability of the group. The dreams they build are subject to regular review on a two- or three-year cycle, so that they can measure their achievements and make adjustments according to the changing context around them. The use of visual media such as photos, pictures and videos is encouraged as this greatly helps with the analysis. The facilitator also plays a key role in the analysis by asking critical questions.

The group's dreams and goals are translated into more concrete actions that they can take collectively. Therefore the next step is to facilitate a participatory planning process within the group, which produces an action plan that draws on the human and other resources they can draw on, defines who the other stakeholders to include are, and distributes roles and responsibilities. This plan has a clear timeframe for implementation, with both long-term and short-term phases.

### **The following boxes outline some of the key elements of this process:**

*Subject: Creating a portrait of women headed households*

*Objectives: Identify and understand conditions, situations and problems of Pekka*

*Media: Lots of selected pictures and photos*

*Method: Brainstorming, group discussion*

*Time: 90 minutes*

*Steps:*

- Explain the objectives of the discussion;
- Place lots of pictures and photos in front of participants, and ask each participant to take a few pictures to describe her feelings, conditions and situations from day to day;
- Ask each participant to share the picture she has chosen and describe what it means for her;
- Record the key words of her explanation that relate to her economic, social, cultural and political conditions. For instance, frequent words might include scarce water supply, fear, having no money, children's schooling, difficult to eat, ugly house, embarrassment and feeling worthless;
- Take her chosen pictures and place them on the flipchart at the front of the group. Repeat this process until all or most of the women have taken their turn;
- Ask all participants to look at the collection of pictures they have chosen and ask them whether the pictures represent their current conditions;
- Further provoke them into sharpening the pictures using additional pictures that represent what they feel and experience;
- When everyone is satisfied with the pictures they have seen, ask them to together underline the important things that represent their current feelings and situation – e.g. poverty, isolation, powerlessness.

*Topic: Pekka's position*

*Objectives: Identify different types of power which control and position Pekka members in the social and political structure*

*Media: Pieces of cardboard, drawing tools*

*Method: Focus group discussion*

*Time: 90 minutes*

*Steps:*

- Ask participants in the plenary discussion to identify various parties around them ranging from their family – i.e. children, husband, parents-in-law etc – to the community and social institutions including indigenous leader, village chief, neighbourhood head, traditional social and religious groups, village midwives, religious teachers etc. When exploring this, do not use the word 'institution'. It is better to use a question: 'who will be contacted or who do you know to share concern about life in your daily life?'
- [how come husbands and in-laws if these are women-headed households? Is the question basically 'who has an interest in your daily life, who is observing or noticing what you do?']
- All answers from participants should be recorded and categorised into family, community, social-cultural, and government institution. For example children, husbands, grandmothers belong in the family institution; neighbourhood head, indigenous leader, religious teachers belong in social-cultural institutions; village head, local government, district head are government institutions. Others such as doctors, nurses, midwives can be part of the social institutions – or the group may categorise according to their own understanding;
- Ask them to create different symbols for each component and category. The symbols might take the form of for example a house, a hammer, a stethoscope – or use colours or numbers for the groups. The symbols are then set out on the coloured papers provided; [?]
- Ask participants to sit in a circle. Put 'the portrait of women headed households' from the previous session in the middle of them;
- Ask them to discuss, based on the symbols for the different institutions that they mentioned, which ones contribute and influence the portrait of their lives and in what ways. Challenge them with more provocative questions when they have identified different institutions – for instance, if they said government influences their poverty ask them in what ways. Note down all the key words in the discussion;
- Provide room and time for all participants to place all of the symbols as they find appropriate [I'm not quite clear about the placing? Multiple symbols being attached to different bits of

*the portrait? Gathering together all the images associated with one symbol??]. But continue to guide them with critical questions about in what ways and how they influence the portrait of their lives. The influence could be positive or negative, strong or weak...;*

- *After all the symbols have been placed according to the discussion, ask them to look carefully at the pictures created;*
- *At this stage introduce the three dimensions of power, by identifying all the elements chosen by them in relation to visible, hidden and invisible power. I do this by using a story – for example I tell a story of my friend who is a victim of domestic violence but wants to stay within her marriage. I ask the women ‘why does my friend act like that?’. They will respond with things like ‘she will feel shame if she gets divorced’; ‘think of the children’, ‘she doesn’t know how to fight’ etc. I then start classifying all of these into different types of power that control that woman. I use the word ‘force from outside and inside’ to make the concept clearer to the women.*
- *In closing, ask them to draw a conclusion from the pictures by putting an emphasis on their position in the society generally, the different power dimensions that influence their access to and control over their own life, family life and life in social and political society.*

*Topic: Pekka’s dream and strategy for action*

*Objective: Develop Pekka strategy*

*Media: Pictures from previous session*

*Method: Discussion*

*Time: 90 minutes*

*Steps:*

- *Place the result of the previous sessions – the portrait of Pekka and the dimensions of power – in the middle of the circle where the members are sitting;*
- *Ask them if they had ‘strong power’ to make changes to the pictures, what would they like to change and how would they like to see change happen in terms of changes in the roles of the different institutions;*
- *Let them have a buzz group discussion, and ask them to start writing some key words on the metaplan provided and place it by the large pictures [?]. For example they might write ‘reduce poverty’ and place it near the government symbol, ‘change the indigenous regulations’ and place it near indigenous leaders etc;*
- *Encourage them to use markers to draw lines if needed, to explain different roles and contributions by each institution to the changes;*
- *Give them time to carefully work on the exercise until we can see clearly the dreams they wish to pursue and the different power dimensions that they think must be worked out to reach their dream;*
- *Lead them to deeper discussion by looking at the different levels of institutions that can influence their path towards the dream. For example, in looking at their micro-enterprise activities they must also consider the role of local, national and global forces which affect their products and markets;*
- *Discuss with them different possible strategies to work on different power dimensions and different levels or arenas that they can engage;*
- *At the end facilitate them to come out with short term and long term strategies for change, and for reaching their dream by working on the different dimensions of power they face.*

Working through the power framework has helped us to work on different issues faced by Pekka groups. The stories of three Pekka leaders can illustrate some of the achievements they have made.

Petronella Peni is leader of a Pekka group and also Chief of Nisa Wulan village, Adonara Sub-district in East Flores. Petronella’s position is rare, maybe even the first example when a widowed woman

like her was directly elected as a village chief in an area where the culture strictly shackles women. With the support of Pekka group members in the area she has been successful in throwing off such traditional shackles by showing that any woman can be a good leader.

She is a widow of about 45, with one child and is one of the few women in this area who finished high school. Her community is on a small, remote island where traditions of patriarchy are strongly enforced. She joined the Pekka group several years ago and became very active, gaining a lot of knowledge and insight about women and their power. This gave her the confidence and courage to put herself forward for election as village head. She believes that the collective power of the Pekka groups in that area can help her in facing power differentials that would deny her leadership. She and her Pekka friends also approach other people in power, including the indigenous leaders who play a very strong role in exercising hidden power in that area, and the local government. She won election as the village head. Her experience is phenomenal since she is breaking all the traditions of a strongly male-dominated society which did not initially want to have women leaders. And she has also proven that she is very good and effective as village head.

[Is this the community where they used videos to record interviews with people about why women can't be leaders, and then made a short film to share about it? From Nani's story at the workshop it seemed this was a powerful tool for breaking down taboos as everyone could see that others were just as ambivalent as themselves...]

Amlia is leader of a Microfinance Institution (LKM) under the auspices of Pasar Wajo Pekka organisation in Buton, Southeast Sulawesi. Her LKM has been successful in providing members with loans of up to four million rupiah, an increase from the previous maximum of one hundred thousand rupiah. Using the operating profits of this LKM they now have their own office building. This is also rare because Pekka groups have always been considered poor, low in status and unable to do anything in their area. Through their LKMs they have proved that they can develop their internal resources to fight against the poverty and economic unfairness they have always faced.

Amlia is a divorced woman of about 35. She is from Buton island, also a small island in the east of Indonesia. She joined the Pekka when it was started on that island in 2002. She only finished the 9<sup>th</sup> grade at school but this is more than most women in the area, and she is smart and eager to learn, with strong leadership skills. For these reasons her friends chose her as the leader of the group. Poverty is a big problem in the area but people tend to consume rather than save. They expect government money to be given to them and do not want to have responsibility for stewarding money. Therefore they have not been able to access the financial resources to become economically active. Amlia and the Pekka group work hard to change women's perceptions around using money, challenge their belief that as poor women they cannot save and have no responsibility for revolving [?] government grants. Step by step Amlia and the Pekka groups managed to mobilise savings and finally develop a microfinance system which became a strong, sustainable financial resource owned and controlled by the poor women.

Rukinah is a Pekka cadre from Lingsar, West Lombok, who is fighting for a better position and status for women in marriage, something that is difficult within the customs and traditions of the area. Through legal empowerment activities Rukinah and her friends disseminate their knowledge about rights and justice for women in the legal system, and as a result new awareness is leading to greater respect for the position of women in families, addressing many issues of violence and injustice encountered by women in the area.

Rukinah is a divorced woman of 43, with two children. In Lombok women are treated very badly. Traditional attitudes are further legitimised [different word?] by Islamic religion so that women tend to be treated very badly in marriage, facing violence, polygamy, and problems with unregistered marriage. Women in this area take it as their destiny to be treated this way as the society and culture are dominated by male religious and community leaders. Rukinah herself is a victim of this situation. She joined Pekka over 5 years ago and learned that she could fight the power which makes

her life difficult, including her own beliefs about women's destiny and the leaders who allow women to have more than one wife. She and her Pekka friends actively educate other women on their legal rights around family and marriage. They have managed to build strong pressure groups and work with multiple stakeholders on legal issues to solve many marriage and family problems in that area.

These three women are just small milestones in the process of empowering female-headed households since 2001. The recovery of trust and self-confidence, and dignity as humans equal to others, is an invaluable achievement in the community of women-headed households. Barriers which marginalise and isolate them for having no husbands have been removed, and now there is a warm space in which to take part in a socialisation process. This space has also been well used by Pekka to contribute to addressing social problems such as poverty, unemployment, delinquency, education and conflict.

**Note on the experience of this process:**

In many workshops the women are surprised when they find out that 'power' is not only about government but also others, even the values they observe in their own lives. Some women are a bit confused at the start since they only relate to power as a governmental thing. In the Indonesian language the word power has a different meaning, so clarifying this means using a lot of examples. The real excitement and 'aha' moments come when the women start sharing the problems they face and analysing them using the dimensions of power. For example, one woman relates to the issues around why other women didn't elect her during a recent parliamentary election – she can see that women still have very strong invisible ideas that women cannot be leaders. The women often raise questions about the effective ways for dealing with different dimensions of power as they seek to resolve their problems.