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# Tari

*Deputy Head of the Village Independent Women's Union  
Labuhan Batu, North Sumatra*

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# Tari

## Deputy Head of the Village Independent Women's Union Labuhan Batu, North Sumatra<sup>1</sup>

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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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<sup>1</sup> **Authors:** Azifah R. Astrina and Smita Tanaya. **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.

*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.