

Laeli

*Chairperson of the Village Constituent Group
East Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara*

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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 her 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 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.