
Hj. Aminah

*Head of the Village Pekka Union and Papadaan Group
North Hulu Sungai, South Kalimantan*

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Hj. Aminah

Head of the Village Pekka Union and Papadaan Group
North Hulu Sungai, South Kalimantan¹

Hj. Aminah who is currently fifty-one years old is an influential woman in her village in North Hulu Sungai, South Kalimantan. In her family village, Aminah is the Head of the Female-Headed Families (Pekka) union. As the head of the union, Aminah has many responsibilities, including leading meetings, holding events, compiling reports on group activities, and reporting to the PEKKA Foundation.²

Aminah, who has a middle school education, has also held other important positions in the village, as the head of the Farmers Group, the treasurer of the fishing group, and head of the Village-Owned Enterprise (BUMDes). Since being elected in 2018, Aminah has been the head of the Pekka Union at the district level.

Aminah's parents were farmers and both active in community life. Her father had been the village mosque's treasurer, while her mother was PKK treasurer. Her parents did not own their own land initially, so they rented land and divided their yield with the owners. After many years of tending this land, they were able to buy their own. They gave this one hectare of land as inheritance to their children, including Aminah.

Aminah was married in 1982 and has three children. Shortly after they married, Aminah's husband moved to Saudi Arabia where he sold hijabs on a tourist visa and lived with family members. In 1985, Aminah joined her husband in Saudi Arabia after he sent her money and they sold hijabs on the side of the road. One day the police were conducting a visa raid. Aminah was almost caught, but she successfully ran and left her products behind.

"I was selling, I had two bags of products. Then my friend said, don't be here, there's police, there's a raid. My friends ran to their own buildings. I was left behind, I didn't run. Then they came. They said, 'we are arresting you.' I was scared. I said, 'I am poor and my child is young.' They said, 'we don't care about you, we will arrest you.' I was caught. But I let go of the bags and ran. I was chased but he didn't run fast, and I ran so fast to a building. That's what happened." (Hj. Aminah, North Hulu Sungai research village 15 July 2019)³

After working in Saudi Arabia for four and a half years, Aminah and her husband returned to Indonesia and tended their ricefields. They did not have a lot of money from their time in Saudi Arabia and were only able to buy a motorbike and pay workers to tend the ricefields. For many years, they lived a simple life managing the ricefields her parents owned. When her husband died in 2007, Aminah experienced financial difficulties and grieved the loss of her closest confidant. Her youngest child was in sixth grade of Islamic primary school and her second child was at university. Despite financial challenges, she continued to prioritise her children's education.

"I cried a lot, cried and wasn't heard by anyone. Oh God, I was sad. I only cried when I prayed. I asked to be protected, asked for good health, that's all. I asked for good fortune. My child was only in year 6 of

¹ **Authors:** Devy Dhian Cahyati and Anastasia Imelda Cahyaningrum. **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.

² PEKKA refers to the organisation whereas Pekka refers to the grassroots organising of women lead by village women.

³ ³ Hj. stands for "Hajjah" and is the title for a woman who has performed the *hajj* to Mekka.

madrasah, and however it would happen I was sure that God is the Greatest Giver. In the end my children finished school. It was my dream that my children would have better education than both their parents.” (Hj. Aminah, North Hulu Sungai research village, 15 July 2019)

One time, Aminah did not have enough money to pay for her children’s transport to school. But, while she was unsure how she would pay for it, someone gave her 20,000 rupiah (2 AUD) as *zakat*.⁴ Aminah used this money frugally. Likewise, when she received the season’s harvest, she saved to buy ricefields. Aminah bought a twelve “bird” sized ricefield, which equates to half a hectare, and in 2017 bought another four and a half “birds” of land for thirty-nine million rupiah (3,900 AUD). Aminah’s commitment to saving and a frugal lifestyle enabled her to buy land and raise her children. Her first child now works as a trader an hour away in Barabai district after finishing middle school, while the second is the Head of Finance in the village, and her youngest child is currently studying at university in Banjarmasin.

At the beginning of 2011, Aminah began to be involved with the Pekka group. She was initially invited by her cousin who is the wife of the Village Head to attend an information event run by the PEKKA Foundation. Aminah as the head of her family and has served as treasurer for the Posyandu and PKK, Aminah was regarded as a suitable candidate to join the union. After the establishment of the village’s Pekka union, the group was not immediately accepted by the local community, even when they went to the village meeting. As Aminah explains:

“Women before were not active and not included and were even chased away: ‘what are women doing here, go home.’” (Hj. Aminah, North Hulu Sungai research village 15 July 2019)

As the leader of the Pekka group since its formation, Aminah has played an integral role in its expansion. Her ability to write and do mathematics made her a very popular candidate for group leader, especially as the majority of the group’s members were much older than her and did not have the capacity to manage an organisation. Even though Aminah had both the ability and personality to become a leader, she felt shocked when she was elected as the group’s head.

“When I was chosen I was shocked. I still have a lot to learn and I’m not the most capable leader. I have the most to learn. I don’t know why I was chosen.” (Hj. Aminah, North Hulu Sungai, 15 July 2019)

Aminah and other group members tried to convince village women that joining the group would personally benefit them. For instance, by joining the group, women could be involved in savings and loan groups and training sessions. During these recruitment attempts, Aminah was often mocked by other women. Another challenge Aminah and her deputy faced was that they had to pay for catering for all group meetings, as many group members expected to be given material benefit and food.

“There were those who mocked us and it was hard to recruit women. There were people who we told to come and that there would be food, and they said ‘will there be money’ I said to the community, at nearly every event you can meet with the wife of the Village Head.” (Hj. Aminah, North Hulu Sungai research village, 15 July 2019)

During the leadership of Ahmad as Village Head, the village government supported the group. For instance, he invited villagers to join with Pekka and bought drums for the women’s group. Even though women were not initially invited to village meetings, Pekka members continued to attend despite being not confident to express their opinions yet.

⁴ *Zakat* is a form of Islamic alms-giving and religious obligation.

“At the beginning we were embarrassed, we hadn’t been invited but we went to every village meeting, particularly Musrenbangdes. Sometimes when a man drove past us we asked ‘where are you going?’ He would say there was a meetings. ‘What meeting?’, ‘a village meeting, gathering there.’ I grabbed a scarf and went there and invited other women.” (Hj, Aminah, North Hulu Sungai research village)

In 2015, Aminah took part in a leadership training program in Jakarta for six days run by the Pekka Foundation. Aminah was the only representative from her village. This training was highly beneficial and increased her understanding of social issues, as well as widening her friendship networks. After participating, she presented the results of the workshop at a union meeting.

As head of the Pekka union, Aminah has experienced a variety of challenges. At the beginning, Aminah felt scared when she met government office officials. After Aminah became comfortable being accompanied by a field staff member to meet with the government staff, she gradually became more confident.

Under Aminah’s leadership, there was one event which made her heart feel heavy. One member of the group declared that left over funds from the group’s cooperative were *haram* (sinful) while the group was in session. In response to this accusation, Aminah explained that the cooperative’s structure ensured that profit was shared between its members.

“One of my members said it was haram. My heart was pounding. I was shocked that she called it haram. Even though we were trying to have a halal [honourable] business. Suddenly, a friend said it was haram and it made me emotional.” (Hj. Aminah, North Hulu Sungai research village, 15 July 2019)

Another challenge Aminah faced with the Pekka group was when women’s proposals were rejected by the village government. At a village meeting, Pekka members had proposed to build a Pekka centre. However, this proposal was rejected because the community thought that constructing a road was a more pressing priority. Later, the Pekka Union, through Aminah as their representative, proposed the purchase of cabinets and a computer for Pekka from the village budget (APBDes). However, once again their proposal was not accepted, this time because they were told that they required an office before Pekka could buy items.

Despite these many challenges, Aminah thinks of the Pekka group like her own child and feels she cannot leave the group. Her younger brothers have invited her to live in another subdistrict, which is around an hour’s drive from her village, but:

“[Being in Pekka], it’s like having a child. It feels like my own child. So, when my brother asks me to move to the city, I say: ‘If only I didn’t have to move, I still care for [Pekka] members. I feel sad about leaving [my Pekka group]. But my brother wants me to move so I don’t have to work in the rice fields anymore.” (Hj. Aminah, North Hulu Sungai research village, 15 July 2019)

Aminah was also a central figure in the formation of the Village Enterprise (BUMDes) with the support of the Village Head who selected her to attend training at the district and in Jakarta.

“I was invited to Jakarta for a training and I heard about the BUMDes, and now there is the Village Regulation. When I was at the training at the district, on the second and final day ... I was at the front and I said, how about we establish a BUMDes in our village, how about if we had a village regulation.” (Hj. Aminah, North Hulu Sungai Research Village, 15 July 2019)

After gaining an understanding about the Village Enterprise (BUMDes), Aminah and other Pekka members advocated for a Village Regulation on a Village Enterprise of fish farming and stock raising. The Village

Regulation was drafted in a village meeting which included Pekka members, the Neighbourhood Head,⁵ the Village Consultative Council and village officials under Aminah's leadership.

"They said create the group first, so we did. Then we made the Village Regulation. It was 100% from Pekka." (Hj. Aminah, North Hulu Sungai research village, 15 July 2019)

Aminah's active role in her community can be seen through her many positions in organisations. At the same time as being a leader in Pekka and the BUMDes, she also held leadership positions as the head of the Farmers Group, a Posyandu cadre and the treasurer of a Fish Farming Group established by a Fisheries Field Officer. Aminah's Fish Farming Group also has a savings and loans group and aims to develop river fish farming, in line with the aims of the BUMDes to develop the village's fish farming industry.

Aminah is also active in village religious life and has played a large role in establishing an Islamic learning forum (*majelis taklim*) which takes place in Aminah's parents' house which she made available for the forum. At the *majelis taklim*, she takes turns leading prayers and Qur'an recitation. Aminah has also played a significant role as a drummer in a traditional *mahdihin* music group with other Pekka members. This group has performed at events on the sub-district, district, and national stages. At the Musrenbangdes in 2017, the *mahdihin* group successfully proposed an allocation of funds from the village budget to service and purchase more musical instruments which they hope will enable them to perform more, and with pride.

"We already had instruments, but they weren't complete. So, at the Musrenbang we proposed to complete the set. Finally, it is complete." (Hj. Aminah, North Hulu Sungai research village, 15 July 2019)

Hj. Aminah's leadership in these many organisations demonstrates how she has experienced significant growth after taking part in PEKKA training and leading the village Pekka union. Now, female heads of families are empowered by new skills, strong networks, and economic resources, and Aminah is one of the most active women in the village.

Aminah hopes that women can achieve equality with men and can be guaranteed their political and economic rights. To continue to develop the village's economy, Aminah will continue to work to establish the BUMDes through the fishing industry and other sectors.

⁵ Rukun Tetangga, the lowest level of government