
Gita

Chairperson of DESBUMI

Central Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara

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Gita

Chairperson of DESBUMI

Central Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara¹

Twenty-seven-year-old Gita is Head of Villages that Care for Migrant Workers (DESBUMI) in a village in Central Lombok. She is a young graduate who chose to apply the knowledge and experience she gained through higher education to empower her local community, rather than finding a job in a major city. After growing up in this Central Lombok village, she studied chemistry for four years at the Indonesian Education University in Bandung with a scholarship from the West Nusa Tenggara provincial government.

After graduating in 2011, Gita returned to the village and was involved in the National Program for Community Empowerment in 2013. This opportunity arose both because of Gita's expertise as an educated young woman and because of her strong social capital. Gita's family are members of the local nobility, and she was the niece of the Village Head at the time. In Central Lombok, being associated with the local nobility conveys significant social capital for those who want to participate in village social and political life.

Gita's involvement in women's empowerment continued when the Panca Karsa Association Mataram (PPK) entered the village to start their program to protect migrant workers in 2014. As she was already working for the National Program for Community Empowerment, Gita was invited by PPK fieldworkers to collect data on villagers' mobility.

"After we had the data, then we were told to start working in the village, we became cadres and held activities. After we got organised then we started bringing the community together." (Gita, Central Lombok research village, 10 July 2019)

Gita was the first person to conduct the migration survey, together with a village office staff member. The survey required patience and resilience as they visited each migrant workers' family one by one to ask about their experiences of departure, the destination country, and duration of their contract. The lack of data about who had worked as a migrant worker also meant that Gita had to be creative and ask survey respondents who else in their area she should record as migrant workers.

To complete the survey, Gita put into practice her good communication skills so that residents would feel comfortable sharing their personal information. Gita's standing and social capital assisted her in gaining their trust.

"It was different from working with the National Program of Community Empowerment which had cadres to help, so it wasn't us directly who were inviting people [to join], like if we held a training session for pregnant women, we just had to give the invitations to the cadres from each hamlet and it was done, then we would wait at the Village Office. With DESBUMI, we go door to door." (Gita, Central Lombok research village, 10 July 2019)

¹ **Authors:** Mustaghfiroh Rahayu and Norin Mustika Rahadiri Abheseka. **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.

The migration data which Gita and her colleagues gathered became the basis of PPK to campaign for the creation of DESBUMI to the village government. DESBUMI is a village-level initiative program created by Migrant CARE to advocate for and support migrant workers and their families. After its formation, Gita and her colleagues promoted the importance of safe migration and document processing services. These initiatives went well because of Gita's leadership and dedication to sharing information and seeking out villagers' experiences of migration.

"We promoted the importance of safe migration in each hamlet first. We made a timetable for the 11 hamlets that we started with and then we shared the timetable. It had on it, on this day we will go to these hamlets, and then we all went there and asked the Hamlet Head for help. We knew who to give the invitations to from our own networks, the survey and the Village Head. If we hadn't given out enough invitations, then we would ask the Hamlet Head." (Gita, Central Lombok research village, 10 July 2019)

Being the leader of DESBUMI required Gita to be a very capable public speaker. Although she had been trained as a teacher, Gita felt that speaking to a group of adults needed different skills.

"I had never been taught about public speaking before, so before I spoke we prepared what I needed to say and sometimes I practiced too. It's okay to present and read ... to read it first if you haven't memorised it yet. Slowly we learned how to communicate." (Gita, Central Lombok research village, 10 July 2019)

Apart from sharpening her communication skills, Gita also widened her knowledge through the DESBUMI program, particularly through paralegal and gender training. She learned how to gather evidence of workers' rights violations, experiences of violence, and illegal migration agents which DESBUMI monitored. As the Chairperson of DESBUMI, Gita often met with women who experienced difficulties while they were working overseas, especially individuals whose rights had been violated. These meetings allowed Gita to put into practice her social skills and what she had learned about how to support victims of mistreatment.

Gita's role with DESBUMI also enabled her to meet with women from different areas at regional and national events. By sharing her experiences and listening to women from other islands, Gita further extended her knowledge.

Under Gita's leadership, DESBUMI made rapid progress. Data on migration began to be recorded systematically, and documents required to work overseas were processed with transparency. Moreover, villagers no longer kept their migrant work secret. This progress reached its peak in 2014, when after lobbying and assistance from Migrant CARE and PPK, the village government issued a Village Regulation on the Protection of Migrant Workers. This Village Regulation stipulated that all departing migrant workers must report to the Village Office and provide complete documentation, including providing copies of their passport and correctly processed visa. Thus, Gita and her DESBUMI cadre colleagues' work to gather data and monitor migrant workers was officially integrated into village government.

The most significant change which Gita experienced since becoming involved with DESBUMI is that she has become more aware of social issues in her local area. Before becoming the leader of DESBUMI, Gita was not aware of the issues faced by migrant workers in her village, such as the problem of illegal agents, wages, and experiences of violence. DESBUMI gave her an opportunity to gain knowledge and to broaden her sense of obligation to helping her community. The training and knowledge Gita learned with DESBUMI has made her a trusted person to confide in and share information about safe migration.

“The first thing [which has changed] is that I know more about migrant labour. At the beginning I didn’t know anything at all about what the departure process is like. We didn’t think that it was a social problem, I rarely did before. At university I wasn’t active in student organisations, because students have limited time, so they have to use it well. The second thing [which has changed] is that I know more about my own community. So now we understand ‘it turns out the village is like this’, before we only knew what was happening around our own house, but now we understand.” (Gita, Central Lombok research village, 10 July 2019)

In 2016, Gita decided to marry a man who her family chose. Getting married did not lessen Gita’s involvement and prioritisation of her work with DESBUMI, because her husband fully supported her. Even when she was pregnant, she carried out all her tasks. In 2017, Gita made a decision which would significantly change her life – she registered in the Frontline Teachers Program and was accepted to teach in Southwest Sumba.² Gita, and her child in tow, now teaches and trains the local community about nutrition. While far from home, Gita applies the knowledge and organisational expertise, particularly her communication and advocacy skills.

“At the start I didn’t know what the environment was like there. I had imagined it and my friends who left before I did told me about it. From Lombok there were 13 of us, and I went last because I had recently given birth. My husband and mother-in-law came too, and my husband gave up his job here.” (Gita, Central Lombok research village, 10 July 2019)

Now, Gita symbolically is still the Chairperson of DESBUMI, but another person carries out the day-to-day management of the group. While she is no longer directly in charge, Gita hopes that DESBUMI will continue its work to accompany, educate and monitor migrant workers. A change in village leadership has produced challenges for DESBUMI cadres. However, she is confident that the cadres who are experienced in dealing with government officials will continue to advocate for regulation, policy, and awareness about safe migration. Her work with DESBUMI has made Gita incredibly caring towards other people. The knowledge and skills she gained through study have given her the tools to eliminate the issues facing migrant workers from her village.

² Frontline Teachers is an initiative of the Ministry of Education which aims to increase the quality of education in remote areas of the archipelago.