

## Article

# Strong Role of Women for Empowered Village

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"I just found out that the village council is very powerful. All this time, I didn't think the village council had any work. That's why I was not too interested when I was elected to become a council member," said Ida, from Kendal, Central Java, in a sharing session of members of the village councils or *Badan Permusyawaratan Daerah* (BPD). Together with 92 female village council members from 15 provinces and 39 districts in Indonesia, Ida attended a workshop on Strengthening the Role of Female Village Council Members in Jakarta on 9-10 March 2020.

The event was initiated by the Women-Headed Household Empowerment Program (PEKKA) together with KOMPAK and MAMPU. The women learned and shared experiences on how to increase their role in promoting village development and engaging with their communities. "Together, we dissect the *Permendagri* (Home Affairs Ministerial Regulation) No.110/2016. From there, I learned that the task of the village council is very important. Now, I became even more excited in my duties as a council member," added Ida.

In addition to learning, the participants – many of whom are housewives and had just become council members or even chairpersons of the village council – also shared the ups and downs of their daily lives; from experiences of being discriminated to family members not being supportive.

"I feel so lucky that my husband and family support me. But as a member of the village council, I feel that my voice has never been heard since I am the only woman out of nine council members in our village. Whereas those who know what women need in village development, definitely are the women themselves. Therefore, I want to advocate the village council to have more female members," said Lisa Tansil, a resident of Kubu Raya, West Kalimantan.

Similar with Lisa, Saniasih – a village council member from Pemasang, Central Java – was fortunate to be able to attend the workshop that was hosted by experienced mentors from PEKKA. She felt more confident and

has even compiled work plans which she will implement once she returns home.

Since 2014, PEKKA, KOMPAK and MAMPU have been undertaking various initiatives to strengthen women leadership in villages. The initiatives are expected to contribute to strengthening Village Law implementation to promote gender equality, particularly for women's participation and leadership in community development. A key mechanism is through the Paradigta Academy, which provides 6-8 month trainings for women from villages on village governance.

"Those attending the workshop are the alumni of Paradgita Academy. No less than 120 PEKKA cadres and Paradigta Academy alumni were elected as members or chairpersons of village councils in villages across Indonesia until now, " said the Director of the PEKKA Foundation Nani Zulminarni.

The duties and functions of the village councils – in accordance with Home Affairs Ministerial Regulation (Permendagri) No.110/2016 – include obtaining information from the village government, proposing recommendations for village regulations, asking questions, as well as giving suggestions and opinions regarding village development.

"Their role as village council members is very strategic in making sure that village development involves the community and that every community member receives the benefit from the resources in the villages. This includes developing and institutionalising democratic, fair, inclusive and accountable community systems, such as effective village councils." Nani concluded.