

REFUGE

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Preface

On 8th March the world will observe the international women's day and United Nations day for women's rights and international peace, reason for JRS to collect stories from courageous women in the communities of Aceh Selatan and allowing them to share their experiences and wishes. Young village girls express their eagerness to learn and contribute to Aceh's rich culture as a way to forgetting about a dark past. A committed teacher that never stopped teaching during conflict times shares her aspirations for a more open school environment. Housewives articulate their wish to participate in village organization and education activities promoting disaster mitigation.

I DON'T MIND THE RISK OF DYING, BUT I WANT THE CHILDREN TO STILL GO TO SCHOOL

By: Paulus Enggal and Rahmawati

"Our school never stopped operating during the conflict," said Siti Hajizar (50)

Silolo State Primary School is the place where she, who has been serving as a teacher since 1982, teaches children in the suburban Pasie Raja Sub-district, South Aceh District. "Being a teacher was my dream since I was small. I didn't know why, maybe just because I liked it," she said, opening the talk that morning. Since her inauguration as a government em-

ployee in 1982, the teacher who is known for the discipline among her students has never left Silolo State Primary School. Part of her heart is anchored in the rice-producing village in Pasie Raja Sub-district. "People considered me as native here," she said. "When there were feasts, I was always invited. When durian or *langsar* (*Lansium domesticum*) is in season, there were, as a matter of course, deliveries from students' parents for me," she add-



ed. She wants to dedicate her entire remaining ten years to this school before retirement, where she has got such a long history as a teacher. Silolo is like a canvas where she has left colours of her life as a teacher including during the time of conflict in Aceh.

Her memory drifted to one morning in May 2000 when the twenty students of grade VI were getting ready for the first day of the final national school examination (EBTANAS). "At that time I was the only person at school since I was living in the teacher's house provided by the government," she said, relaying her experience 10 years ago. Being the only teacher living at school was a normal situation for the mother of three. Conflicts often made teachers afraid of carrying out their duties, even more so if they had to go to areas security personnel labeled as a basis of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM). "I was often threatened either by GAM members or the Indonesian Army (TNI). "Therefore, I often moved. Once I was in Silolo, another time in Kampung Baru," she clarified. (Those two places are in the area of Pasie Raja, South Aceh).

One morning which was meant to be the climax of six years studying at school turned to be a dark page in the life stories of Siti Hajizar and her twenty students. "A bomb exploded in Rambung. Shortly after the Indonesian Army entered Silolo. Some were in vehicles, some were on foot," she disclosed her story. The army chasing GAM members lead to an exchange of gun fire between the two sides. "Without wasting time, I gathered the students straight away in the government-provided teacher's house. Their parents were too afraid to pick them up from school. Normally during gun fire people were scattered," she added. "I asked all children to sit down. They cried. I tried to calm them down. I tried everything to comfort them," she said. With her husband, who is always by in her side, they prepared breakfast for the children who were used to going to school with empty stomachs. "Not long after, some houses started to be on fire. I brought the children to the mountains in front of the school because we were afraid that they would also burn the school," described the woman who is from Simpang Lhee (a village in North Kluet, South Aceh).

"I brought a set of containers for food with rice and side dishes because we didn't know how long we had to hide in the mountains," she explained. There was nothing they could do. "We just hid and laid on our stomachs behind the stones. We were worried that the army would come up to the mountain," she added while gazing into the air. According to Siti, whose first-born son joined the army, the children were very frightened because some of their parents were members of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM). "The children were concerned about their parents and families," she said. "At that time we had not got any training (living values) from JRS. Therefore we didn't know how to comfort the children," she explained with a smile. Being displaced in the mountains did not help to make the children feel at ease. From the distance they could observe images of the violence taking place before their eyes. Houses burning and blasts of hot tins from gun barrels. Swear words, curses and screams of pain and fear.



Mrs Siti Hajizar: Conflict times were difficult

"Those were things witnessed by the children during the conflict," explained the teacher who has dedicated herself to the world of education for 28 years. She believed that the conflict affected the lives of her students at that time. "They always drew guns. Our school walls were full with graffiti and obscure drawings," she added. Children used to model on what they saw outside. "At school they would often imitate what they saw from men (GAM or TNI) such as hitting, kicking and other things," said Siti who graduated from teacher training school (SPG). She believed that during conflicts fights regularly occurred in school. Even, the dislikes for certain teachers were expressed openly through threatening words written on the walls. Becoming a teacher in conflict period for her was a profession full of pen drawings with colour - of challenges, love and grief.

"We get pressure both from the top and the bottom level," she said. GAM did not allow teachers to wear the government employee's uniform, or give Moral Education based on the Fice Principles (Pancasila), do the flag raising ceremony, sing anthems and even use Indonesian language at school. "I just followed their rules," she continued. "For me, the important thing was to be able to go to school and teach the students," she said. "The school had to always remain open," she added. She always responded to her family's anxiety towards her desire to teach with a smile. "I love those children, I don't mind the risk of dying as long as they can still go to school and can get better education than their parents," she closed her story from the conflict.

For her, peace is a blessing. Her hope is clear - for conflict to never happen again. This does not mean that only educating children in peaceful times would necessarily make her life easier in the future. There are still lots of things to do in developing a good education for the children after the conflict. At least, when peace has come, there are chances for *Serambi Mekah* (Veranda of Mecca) to pursue the things which were left unfinished. "For example, the training carried out by JRS yesterday with us in Tapaktuan," she said. Living Values training empowers one to create a cheerful situation and conflict-free environment at school. "Now we can talk with the children, understand what they want and make the children happy at school," closed the most senior teacher of Silolo State Elementary School.

THE SPIRIT OF PEACE OF WOMEN IN THE RED ZONE



Members of Simpang Dua Village youth group cut their chilli plants



Marina and friends during a JRS training

By: *Ninuk Setya Utami*

Baina laid her head on the back of her palms looking over the backrest of her chair. On purpose she sat down reverse on her chair. Her voice was soft when she was telling the fragments of her life between 2001-2004. The dark ages of conflict between Aceh Freedom Movement (GAM) and the Indonesian Army that broke out the land of *Serambi Mekah* (Veranda of Mecca).

"It was the fasting month. I forgot that it was the day of sports training. When I was passionately helping my mother in preparing the food for breaking the fast, I was called by a soldier. I was remembered that I had to practice volleyball. He was angry with me and yelled at me. Then he asked me to go to the river behind my house. I had to sit in the river for hours, until the break of the fast."

The girls from Simpang Dua Village, East Kluet Sub-District, South Aceh District revealed that the volleyball practice for women was a must. It was the Indonesian Army who made it an obligation.

Though cold and hungry, this girl who was still in junior high school at that time didn't have any courage to resist. "He carried a gun. I was not allowed to get out from the river until he told me to do so. If we resisted, the gun points were already at our heads."

Such a confession was also revealed by three friends of Baina's. They were Abizah, Marina and Bangun Hayati. According to the three girls who were active in the youth organisation, there was no word of "late" for them.

"We were not allowed to come late even just for one minute. If we came late, everyone knew the consequence of it. We would be punished running around the court 10 times or as often as they liked, having to sit in cold water like Baina, doing push ups, etc. Some of us were even kicked," said Abizah, who was also an elementary school teacher in her village.

Baina who was active in her role as a treasurer in the

youth organisation in her village added that when conflicts occurred there were always people who had to lay in water or treated badly by the military personnel every day.

"The number of our clothes was no longer enough for us to wear. My father was often immersed in water when he didn't know the answer to the military's questions. On the way home from the field, he had often to stand in water by some angry military personnel. How many times he had to do that was countless. But I once resisted. The military person kept quiet. They were arbitrary," Baina said, laughing in triumph.

Close supervision

Living in a village that was considered the area of the Aceh Freedom Movement (GAM), which was often called the red zone, meant that we were under a close supervision. Several obligations regardless the conditions of the village were applied.

The head of the Youth Organisation of Simpang Dua Village, Marina, said that even to meet the need of food the people had to obey the rules applied by the personnel of the Indonesian Army. The people were obliged to plant sweet potato and vegetables in their yard.

"We were not allowed to work on our fields. If we wanted to go to our fields we had to pass the checkpoint, report there and we were searched. We were asked to leave our ID card at their hands. We were not allowed to bring rice or food. They suspected that we brought food for the members of the Aceh Freedom Movement (GAM)."

Marina also said that rice and food that belonged to the villagers had to be kept at the checkpoint. Every day the villagers had to come to the check point to queue for rice according to the numbers of the people in their family. This experience created the need for a new strategy for most villagers.



Two members of Simpang Dua Village youth group: Abizah and Baina

"If we had to go to the market for our family needs we had to be careful to get exactly right the amount so that it wouldn't be taken by the military. Unfortunately, although we had bought grocery according to our needs, they still took some from us."

It was not only matters of life that they controlled. Even the relation between human beings and the Creator was controlled. "Attendance on the Friday prayer was controlled too. Those who didn't attend the prayer were noticed. They created various punishments. For boys and men these punishments were harder," Marina said while slightly laughing.

Displaced

If asked to count how many times the people had fled, Marina, Baina, Abizah and Bangun Hayati said they couldn't remember anymore. In their memory, every time there was gunfire in the village or hills around their village the people fled. Mass displacement occurred twice.

"We, from Simpang Dua and Simpang Tiga Village, once fled to Malaka Village, sheltered in a junior high school building. It was the fasting month and there was gunfire. We fled because we felt threatened. We fled for more than a month," said Abizah. Bangun Hayati and Baina nodded their heads, agreeing to Abiza's words.

Following a threat, people settled temporarily in a village behind the hill, Paya Ateuk Village in Pasie Raja Sub-District. "Every time we returned from our displacement, things were messy. Our belongings were gone. Nobody knew where they were gone. Goats, chickens ... all gone," Marina said.

"It was weird, though, that no dead animals were found. All were gone," said Abizah, who was the secretary of the Youth Organization at the time.

"Goat shit was brought into our houses. They also put it in our clothes which we left behind. I don't know what to say. Uggghh ... never let such a thing happen again. We are tired," Baina added with a sigh.

Gaining back the spirit

During the conflict, the youth and all other villagers was scared of both conflicting parties, the Indonesian Army and the Aceh Freedom Movement (GAM). "They both had guns. Women were forced to practice volley ball by the military personnel. If we resisted we had to stand in water. Consequently GAM considered us as having a close relationship with the Indonesian Army, though actually we were forced to do what they wanted us to do. Our life was threatened by the Aceh Freedom Movement. Both of them had made us scared," Bangun sighed.

In peaceful times like now, the four young women want to forget their past despite the pain remaining because of repeatedly being treated badly. Challenge after challenge had to be faced by the women who are enthusiastic about developing their village.

"I can't forget the shameful treatment I received from the military, nor how they treated our brothers? Frankly, even under the most painful conditions we had to protect our brothers in the hills. However, after a peace was achieved, they got jobs, all kinds of assistance, whereas we are left without any attention. They don't care about their sisters and other brothers who are left in agony because of the conflict," revealed Marina.

On the other hand, some youth activities from before the conflict were not practiced anymore until now. Some people even opposed the revival of a youth organisation.

"How can we achieve something like our parents if we are prohibited to carry out activities. We are never told why our activities are prohibited. There are only rumours saying that girls are not allowed to do sports and dance. We simply want to train primary school students to dance," said Abizah.

"How can they just expect us to stay home idly? No art is allowed. Even it is Acehnese culture that we learn. It is strange that girls are not allowed to advance themselves," said Baina.

Marina hopes that peace will really become true in a real form. "Peace is peace. But please return our spirit so that we don't only remember our bitter past. We want our enthusiasm for arts and social activities to return. Art equipments used to be available but now all are destroyed by the conflict. It is just not right to prohibit something without any reasons."

Luckily, village administrators, including *geuchik* (village head) and youths fully support the girl's activities.

INTERNATIONAL DAYS

21 February	International Mother Language Day
8 March	International Women's Day and United Nations Day for Women's Rights and International Peace
21 March	International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
21-28 March	Week of Solidarity with the Peoples Struggling against Racism and Racial Discrimination
22 March	World Water Day



Mrs Rafnaini: PKK treasurer of Panjupian Village, Tapaktuan Sub-District

By: Daryadi Ahmadi

The knowledge on disaster risk reduction acquired by Mrs Rafnaini (38) is indeed something new that she would like to pass on to the women's community at her *gampong* (village). But a forum for this purpose is not available, because all activities at the PKK (family welfare education program) in Panjupian Village are dormant. As the PKK treasurer, who took part in a training on village planning with the perspective on disaster risk reduction held by JRS in December 2009, Rafnaini doesn't know what forum she can use to pass on her knowledge to others.

It's not the same for Mrs Martina (46), a widow with a child, who was representing the vulnerable people in her village. Martina said after the training, she often discussed about the disaster threats with her friends of the same age at the local *warung* (food stall) or when members of the vulnerable villagers gather over the duck-breeding program. Martina also has suggested to the heads of Lorong Hilir that the roadside sewer near her house be repaired; because they are too small and overflow during heavy rains causing flooding in her house.

"All I can do is just pass it on in *Yasin* prayer sessions, even though the opportunities aren't always available," said Rafnaini, a tailor. The PKK (family welfare education program) in Panjupian Village, Tapaktuan Sub-district, has been inactive for sometime. They only meet once every 6 months. The monthly meeting has not been held since the conflict broke out.

Mrs Rafnaini is actually an active person in her village. She regularly takes part in the *Yasin* prayers, women's monthly gatherings like *arisan* and *Dasa Wisma*. But the fact is that the sessions have provided limited opportunities for anyone to disseminate the knowledge on disasters. "In *arisan*, we just collect money for the lottery drawing, and

in *Yasin* prayers we just come and pray straight away. On *Dasa Wisma*, our real activity is sharing certain meals for the mourning family," added the mother that dropped out of Tapaktuan SMEA (economics vocational high school). She said that PKK would look busy only when a contest of PKK is held – such as *Gamawar* (Gampong Mawadah Warohmah – Peaceful and Prosperous Village) at the nearby settlement of Air Pinang, which won the contest held in the past month. "I don't know why nobody wants to be active in the village. Not only do they rarely take part in contests like this, but it is already difficult to just gather," said Rafnaini.

Rafnaini claims she knows well all dangers threatening her neighbourhood, including floods, landslides and river erosion. Being a housewife and mother, she tries seriously to use her knowledge and put it into actions, like avoiding to dump waste improperly and regularly clearing the sewer around her house.

"Sometimes when in the *warung* I have a chat with other women about the threats of flood and landslide," the mother of two explained. With her husband, Sukri, she lives in Hilir in the outskirts of the village next to fields and a hill. "We've had flooding in this neighbourhood before, but it hit another part of the village which is located further downhill," she said.

That's different from what Martina has done, since her house lays in a vulnerable area – close to a river and on a downstream plain, barely 300 metres from the riverbank. At least she knows very well the importance of the sewage system around her house for channeling any rainwater pouring into her area. She also understands her neighbourhood's vulnerability. The river is not big, but when water flows down massively due to torrential raining on the hills, one just cannot rule out the danger of floods here.



Martina: one of vulnerable group members from *Gampong Panjupian* who attended disaster risk reduction training

From the six-day training in Tapaktuan, Martina also knows all the signs of flooding and all the necessary preparations. "A two-day raining and stones rolling down from the hill is a sign of the coming of a big flood. The river behind my house is inevitably going to overflow," said Martina, a mother of a grown-up son who earns a living as a laundry-woman in her village. She also said that when Nias Island was struck by a powerful earthquake in March 2005, she literally ran up to the hill top at night. Her house located by the river bank makes her alert at all times. Martina also begins to become aware of the necessity to preserve the river – by not exploiting stones, gravel and sand from it – and the importance of maintaining the trees on the hills. But she adds that she cannot do much apart from passing on her knowledge to other villagers.

Conflict story

Panjupian Village, which is located near the coast and flanked by hills, is relatively close to the town of Tapaktuan – only 8 kilometres away. The impact of past conflicts in this village is similar to others in Kluet and Pasie Raja area. "A sense of fear, yes, prevailed, of course, particularly then when the outposts hadn't been erected yet. We had to be kind to any people coming from the mountains. Previously, when the outposts had not been set up, mountain people (insurgents hiding in the mountains) often came down and

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stopped by asking for meals or rice to be taken back to the hills," Rafnaini told us. As Rafnaini's house was very close to a hill, people descending from the mountains normally came to hers first, the same experience was also gained by Mrs Martina, who lived by the main road. All she felt was fear and worry and it was difficult for her to travel to the town.

The conditions however changed when a military post had been erected near the hill slope. The village was more secure. The mountain people came down less often. For Rafnaini, this period of conflict even gave her some extra benefit, as she received more tailoring orders from members of the Indonesian army (TNI), including sewing nametags, symbols and badges. A lot of changes have taken place between the pre-conflict and post-conflict periods regarding Rafnaini's tailoring business. During the pre-conflict time the tailoring ran well, because the economic condition was sound – especially when people still relied on nutmeg and Patchouli oil. Now, according to her, the economy does not perform well, because people in villages get less income since many nutmeg trees have gone dead and prices of Patchouli oil is low.

Thus, there is still a big socio-cultural gap to overcome for women living in rural areas wanting to take on a role as communal educators in the subjects of disaster prevention. The organizational capacities and structures have to be further improved to costume aspirations of women wanting to play a role in the information dissemination for example on disaster mitigation. It remains difficult for women to participate in rural communities in South Aceh who are still dominated by the characteristics of patriarchy.

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