

Sumiyah : Empowerment from Within

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Sumiyah is a 49-year-old woman living with her husband who works as a fisherman and three children who are currently enrolled in high school and junior high school. Living by the sea where many people work either as fishermen or fishmongers, Sumiyah has found an opportunity to make some extra income for her family, which is also related to fish and fishing.

Due to the fact that she is from a poor family, Sumiyah never got a proper level of education for herself. Therefore, when she got married and tried to support her family's income, all she could do was an informal job that didn't pay much. As a mother of three with a husband who works on the sea for days, Sumiyah was extremely busy managing her time. Financial hardship due to the lack of income made her do many things by herself since she had to save the money.

Until 2010, Sumiyah was working as a snack seller to support her family. The spirit of getting more income to support her family made Sumiyah actively look for information near her home, in case there are job opportunities for her. Sumiyah's home is located not far from the sea and her village is known as a fishing village. Around the area, there is a fish auction center where the fishermen sell their fish. When Sumiyah received news about the opportunity to get a job of deboning milkfish at the auction center, she applied for it. But, first of all, she had to take training for five days. The training was provided by the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries for free of charge. 50 participants took part in the event. Those who passed the training would have the opportunity to work at the auction center.

The five-day training made Sumiyah trained to; 1. remove bones from milkfish, 2. create long-lasting snacks using the fish as the main ingredient. This experience really opened Sumiyah's eyes. Now she got many points of view that might increase her family's income. After passing and completing the training, Sumiyah got the job at the auction center. She became a worker who specializes in deboning milkfish. Her working time is from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. every day. For the job there, she earns approximately Rp.100,000 (almost 1,000 yen). After finishing the job at the auction center, Sumiyah gets home and then prepares to start selling snacks for school children. Indeed Sumiyah still continues her previous activity to double her income. She works until about 5:00 p.m. Sumiyah then proceeds to cook and prepare dinner. After 6:00 p.m., when her husband is about to work as a fisherman, Sumiyah prepares his food, clothes and drink. Her husband comes home on the following day at around 11:00 a.m.

According to Sumiyah, her life drastically changed after 2010 when she completed the training and began to get more income from the auction center. Before 2010, she doubted whether her children could get proper education due to the family's low income. Since she finally got the chance to increase her family's income, all of her children are now at school, which makes her so happy.

Sumiyah's determination to change her life by herself is a picture of how women empowered by the situation can create a good result in the end. Such empowerment was gained due to her own mind or outside pressure. Sumiyah showed us how life can be made better if we try. In the case of Sumiyah, she had the opportunity to empower herself with the help of the government through the training which was provided for free, in addition to her husband's support.

As we have seen above, women's empowerment can happen in many forms. Sumiyah determined to get a better life, and she got the chance. Her determination was supported by

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the chance provided by the government as well. To some extent, governments must also be there to actively support empowerment. Such trainings as the one attended by Sumiyah have proven to be very useful. Of course the willingness of women to be empowered is the most important point. But at the same time, there should also be some kind of active supports from governments everywhere. Empowerment doesn't have to be complex and complicated. As seen in Sumiyah's case, tailored programs must be provided considering the livelihood and what is needed by women around the area.

Photo below: Sumiyah is cleaning the fish

