

Female Farmer Empowerment : A story from the field

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During a pandemic, many people around the world experienced economic hardship. Restaurants were closed or had limited operating hours, while some factories reduced their workforce and many small traders were no longer able to sell because some areas were locked down to reduce mobility and crowds.

In the first three semesters of the year 2020 when the pandemic just began and the government has not been ready yet with social security program, solidarity amongst women became primary social safety net. They helped vulnerable groups particularly those who had lost their income automatically organized based on voluntarily work. A friend helped other friends.

In Central Java, women solidarity appeared as interfaith collaboration. Women from different religious affiliation collected donation, produced fabric masks to substitute medical masks which were far more expensive. Food and other basic needs have been shared. After the social security program have been managed systematically by the government, women solidarity continues working to support children to get better access on online education and supporting with women mental health consultation. Those story are examples of the practicing women solidarity in Central Java.

Generally we have seen that the worst impact of the pandemic in Central Java hit families who live in the peri urban areas. They experience greater difficulties than the village community. In rural areas, residents can rely on garden crops, while in peri-urban areas, most residents work in the informal sector, which depends on urban economic activities.

Confirmed by national data (BPS) on the poverty situation during the pandemic, it was stated that in March 2021 10.14% or as many as 27.54 million Indonesians were poor. Although the poverty rate in March 2021 was slightly lower than September 2020, it was still higher than conditions before the pandemic in September 2019 (<https://smeru.or.id/id/content/situasikemiskinan- selama-pandemi>).

This article will inform about women solidarity which has been built by SRI Belanda and Javanese villagers in the Musuk District, Central Java Province, Indonesia, in collaboration with Post Graduate Program, Sebelas Maret University Surakarta under the activity of women empowerment program. There were two activities which were done in the period of June-august 2021, those were visiting female farmers and giving psychological support. Visiting village was meant to know women condition and her story on how the pandemic impacted them. Since gathering was forbidden, individual conversation has been done and continued by giving subsidy for internet fee to those who have school children and also to one of widow. This widow is the mother of mas Noko, who passed away on November 2020 and he was a village coordinator to mediate SRI Belanda and villagers. From her, we get information that the *warung*, which was initiated by Noko supported by many programs including SRI Belanda, presents like a 'gift'. *Warung* has supported her life, supported her to survive during pandemic and keep her busy. While *kambing* 'goat' which once get supported by SRI Belanda in 2017, also becomes a saving. During pandemic, women sold some of the goat and they used the money to buy basic need. Through this stories we see that *warung* and *kambing*, are kind of emergency economic safety net for women. Under women control, they able to decide when their property either kept or sold.

As the pandemic conditions become more severe in June-august 2021 marked by a high mortality rate with the emergence of Delta, a new strain of Covid 19, the internet communication becomes primary tool for contacting. Solidarity and communication between Indonesia and SRI Belanda were also done using internet. During pandemic, we are calling each other more often to share our health and share our strength. Through a close friendship, this difficult moment was shared and listened carefully to what was happening in Indonesia, especially Central Java. In this way we learned that exchanged information is also a way to strengthen each other. Sharing hope is always a good side in passing with this pandemic.