



## PROFILE

# Never say die

**Hard Work by Masnu'ah, a leader of the fisherwomen's group, Puspita Bahari finally pays off**

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**T**he ocean is my blood and wind is my breath! For Masnu'ah, a fisherwoman and leader of the fisherwomen's group in Morodemak in the Bonang district of Indonesia's central Java, the ocean is an inseparable part of her being.

Born into a poor fisher's family in Jepara, central Java, Masnu'ah, also called Nuk, was trained from an early age to help the family with drying and selling fish and gathering wood for cooking. Later, after marriage, she

moved to Bonang, where she now lives with her husband and son.

Masnu'ah began to understand the hardship that fishers face from her own experience as a fisherwoman in Bonang. The fisher's life is steeped in poverty and the levels of poverty peak during the 'middle capture season'—a time of extreme weather when fishing is impossible, government support unavailable and no capital aid is on hand.

Noticed for her leadership skills, Masnu'ah was approached by some to start an initiative to encourage independence among women, particularly to help families tide over the 'middle capture season'. And thus was born Puspita Bahari, a fisherwomen's group started in 2005 with a capital amount of IDR 1mn (US\$105).

Puspita Bahari started out as a rice co-operative, sourcing rice for sales to fisherfolk families, with a benefit amount of IDR 200 or only about 2 cents per kg. This activity earned

Puspita Bahari IDR 2mn (US\$211) that year. In 2006, the co-operative venture received a setback because the capture fisheries were badly hit. Fishers were not being able to get enough fish, and payments for rice began to drop.

As the co-operative folded up, Masnu'ah arranged for entrepreneurial training for women in making traditional dishes such as *getuk lindri* (steamed cassava sprinkled with coconut), ice-cream, noodles and fish flour. However, although the food products were seen as safe and hygienic, the cost was beyond the reach of most villagers.

In 2009, after other ventures such as setting up beauty parlours and auto repair shops also failed, Masnu'ah turned to using fish as the basic raw material for food products, and initiated a fish chips and *abon* (shredded beef) venture through Puspita Bahari. In the beginning, the products met with little enthusiasm. They were made at home and so the taste and flavour varied from batch to batch. Masnu'ah, therefore, insisted on standardizing the products, from the fish to the spices used. Today, the chips are marketed widely and bring in much-needed income into families.

At the same time, Puspita Bahari initiated an organic waste segregation venture for which it received an award in October 2011. It was also appointed a mediator for a boat aid project through which it got involved in the wider network called Indonesia Fisherwomen Sisterhood (PPNI). Says Masnu'ah: "If you believe that an effort will serve many people, then never give up, because it will surely succeed." The recognition and awards, like the Kusala Swadaya award, that Puspita Bahari is getting today are trophies, Masnu'ah believes, for all fisherwomen and their fearless spirit. ❏