

## Empowering Pungkat Women's Group in Pungkat Village, Gaung Sub-district, Indragiri Hilir District

Pungkat Village in Gaung Sub-district, Indragiri Hilir District, Riau Province, is a village located on an area of 11,487 hectares with the total population of 680 households. In total, there are 1,252 men and 1,196 women. To reach Pungkat Village from Riau's capital city, Pekanbaru, one would first have to travel to the district's capital, Tembilahan, for 7 hours by land. Upon reaching Tembilahan, the journey continues via river by a small boat, locally called the pancung boat, for approximately 3 more hours to Pungkat Village. The village itself is located on the river bank of Gaung River.

Pungkat Village consists of 4 hamlets located opposite of each other. One of the hamlets, Dusun Mekar Jaya, is located on the left side of Gaung River, while the other hamlets, namely Dusun Sederhana, Dusun Mandiri, and Dusun Lestari, are located on the right-hand side of the river.

Source : WRI doc



All the public facilities in Pungkat Village, including the village head's office, the Village Health Centre, a mosque, a primary school, an Islamic junior high school, and the Family Empowerment for Welfare (PKK) Office, are located in the centre of the village, in Dusun Lestari. The walking time to the public facilities from Dusun Lestari and Dusun Mandiri is 5-10 minutes, while the walking time from Dusun Sederhana and Dusun Mekar Jaya takes approximately 15-20 minutes.

### Women's Reproductive Health Issues

The benefits of the Village Health Centre's presence in Pungkat Village are not sufficiently felt by the people of Pungkat Village. The Village Health Centre has inadequate health facilities and is rarely open. In addition, the village midwife's role is not utilised effectively by the people, especially the women or mothers of Pungkat Village. The village midwife commonly assists pregnant women in their houses or residences, and only rarely assists them in the Village Health Centre. This is because the midwife never lives in the health centre's accommodation, and opts to stay in the residents' houses due to her fear of living alone. The health centre's location is actually located next to the village head's office and other public facilities (such as schools and mosques), as well as the residential area.

In every normal and uncomplicated delivery, mothers are generally assisted by the traditional birth attendant. After the delivery is successful, the village midwife would take over the patients for further care such as administering medicine,

cleaning and weighing the baby, etc. If the delivery is a complicated one, the delivery process is assisted by a midwife from a neighbouring village, Simpang Village, or further referred to the district hospital.

If their delivery is only assisted by the traditional birth attendant and village midwife, they would commonly need to spend approximately IDR 500,000-600,000. However, if their delivery is complicated and needs further assistance from another village midwife, the cost would increase, amounting to IDR 1-1.5 million. If they need to be referred to the district or sub-district hospital, it would certainly cost more, as the expense includes not only the delivery cost but also the boat rent. This is heavily burdensome for the villagers, especially since they are not provided with information or assistance for free childbirth from the government.

### **Local Source of Income**

In Pungkat Village, locals have two main sources of income: coconut plantation and wooden boatbuilding. Following the presence of palm oil companies (PT. Setia Agro Lestari or PT. SAL) in Pungkat Village in 2014, conflict occurred between the villagers and the companies. The conflicts arose from the people's view that the companies were usurping the forest area where they usually source their wood for boatbuilding material. Due to the conflict, as much as 21 citizens of Pungkat Village were imprisoned, causing a trauma among the people.

For the residents of Pungkat Village, wooden boatbuilding is their main livelihood. It is a practise that has been passed down through generations, and their wooden boats are renowned for their superior quality. In sourcing the wood as the raw material for boatbuilding, the people of Pungkat Village practises selective cutting. They have a special specification for the diameter of the trees that can be cut as a raw material for boatbuilding; usually trees around 15-20 years old with a diameter of 15-20 cm.

After the land surrounding them was taken over by palm oil companies, people started to lose their

livelihoods. Despite being well-known as builders of both small and large wooden boats, the locals of Pungkat Village lost their access to wood as the main material of boatbuilding, due to the companies' practice of clear-cutting the forests to change its function into palm oil plantations. Consequently many people, especially the men, lost their jobs as boat builders. As an alternative, they opted to plant coconuts and areca nuts in their land, which was increasingly shrinking as a result of the palm oil companies' concessions. The women of Pungkat Village, to support their household's income, turned to areca nut peeling; either areca nuts from their own garden or from other people's plantation, where they were out-sourced.

### **Impacts of Palm Oil Companies to the Environment**

Following the presence of palm oil companies in Pungkat Village, people can no longer use water from the originally clean river that was used as a source of water for daily life, such as showers, clothes-washing, and water consumption. The water from the river is now polluted and oily. In the past, the river was very clean that its water can be drunk directly without having to be boiled. Village women would also go together to take water from the river using jerry cans, as collecting water is seen as women's duty.

Since the river and swamps became polluted and muddy, both from the traffic of motor vessels transporting on the river and the pesticide used by the palm oil companies that polluted them, residents—especially the women—can only use the river's water for washing and showering purposes. Meanwhile, to get clean water used for cooking and drinking, the village women would collect rainwater in their houses. Although there is a well of clean water located in the village mosque, the people, especially women, are unable to use it much because it is mainly used for the mosque's needs. This makes the locals reluctant to use the water for domestic purposes. Thus, to fulfil their need of clean water for cooking and drinking, they are forced to buy water.

Another issue that is becoming an epidemic is

the beetle pest attack on the people's coconut plantations. The pest comes from the remnants of rotted trees left after being cut down by the companies. However, both the companies and the government have not taken action to overcome this insect attack on the locals' coconut plantations. As a result, those who failed to harvest their coconuts lost their livelihoods. Now, local women turn to selling fritters to support their family's income.

### **Women's Participation in Advocacy Efforts for Health and Reproductive Rights in Pungkat Village, Gaung Sub-district, Indragiri Hilir District, Riau Province**

The expansion of palm oil companies' concession in many areas, including Riau, has reduced the residential area and limited people's access to the forest. This highly affects the people's rights to access the forest that had been managed collectively from generation to generation. According to the locals, the land was taken without adequate compensation or communication with the residents. The grant of concession to the palm oil companies has impacted the people's livelihood and access to food and natural resources.

In March-August 2016, Riau Women Working Group (RWWG) supported by Women Research Institute (WRI) carried out research and mentorship programmes in Pungkat Village to improve women's participation in the advocacy effort for health and reproductive rights as well as the access rights to forest concessions. The research and mentorship programmes were carried out for 6 months from March 2016 to August 2016.

#### **The Establishment of the Women's Group**

The women's group established is called Pungkat Women's Group and consists of 20 members.

The group's activities include:

##### **1. Regular Discussions**

Regular discussions are carried out every month with different themes to enhance the group's awareness and understanding of reproductive health and environmental issues around them.

From the regular discussions, members also learn to identify the issues they face concerning reproductive health and environmental problems. The findings of this identification of problems will be presented when they are prepared to meet the government's representatives.

##### **2. Capacity building for Pungkat Women's Group**

A number of capacity-building activities are organised to create local women leaders through various trainings, including gender perspective in advocacy trainings. These various capacity-building activities are expected to develop more local women leaders who are capable of carrying out advocacy efforts for issues in their immediate environment, especially the ones that directly affect women.

Source : WRI doc



##### **3. Multi Stakeholder Forums (MSF)**

The Multi Stakeholder Forum (MSF) is a workshop that aims to bridge the gap between the locals in general, and the women's group in particular, and decision-makers at the district level. The latter includes the regional parliament (DPRD) of Indragiri Hilir District and other related institutions, such as the Health Office, Women's Empowerment and Children Protection Office, Agriculture and Food Crops Office, Horticulture Office, and NGOs. These institutions are expected to assist the women's group in resolving their advocacy issues.



The group's regular discussions have identified 3 main issues that need to be addressed and resolved by the Indragiri Hilir District government, namely:

1. Increasing the number of medical workers, i.e. live-in midwives, and improving the health facilities in Pungkat Village  
Eradicating beetle pests stemming from the palm oil companies' clear-cutting practices in
2. Pungkat Village, which causes the damage and decay of the people's coconut trees and destroys harvests
3. Providing clean water due to the polluted river and swamps.

At the MSF, the villagers succeeded to press the government, in this case the Health Office, to provide a village midwife to reside in their village. The Health Office also promised to provide information and dissemination on BPJS (the national health insurance) for poor families to obtain free childbirth services.

#### 4. Mentorship

The mentorship for the women's group is carried out by placing a field staff to temporarily live with the residents of Pungkat Village to build the trust between facilitators and the members of the women's group (as the mentored group) as well as the villagers. The objective of the mentorship is to empower the locals, especially Pungkat Women's Group, in developing their potential to achieve a better quality of life. In addition, it aims to facilitate decision-making processes related to the needs of women's groups, capacity-building in increasing income, and participatory activity planning and implementation.

In the 6 (six) months of the mentorship, the group members' courage in decision-making and negotiating processes with the government gradually grew. In terms of improving their prosperity, the group has also been able to carry out participatory economic planning, and it is expected that their activities can be developed to achieve the members' and group's independence.

To support the mentorship's programmes and the women's group's activities, the field staff also carries out an individual approach to the community members, enabling a full support from every element in Pungkat Village.

