Project 3-A
Region: Asia
Country: Indonesia

Project:
The Empowerment of Domestic Workers in Jakarta and Greater Jakarta

Donors:
ILO – ILO Jakarta Office

Project Description:
Rumpun Gema Perempuan (RGP) has worked on domestic worker issues since its establishment in August 2000. This group currently works with 175 domestic workers, many aged 16-23 years old. A central purpose of RGP is to organize domestic workers and strengthen their capacity to struggle for their rights. A key objective is to raise awareness in society and among domestic workers about domestic workers’ basic rights and how to realize them.

Raising awareness among workers involves building their capacity to understand their own rights and obligations as workers, human beings, women, citizens, and children. To achieve this goal, domestic workers have organized themselves in a self-help group called OPERATA (Organisasi Pekerja Rumah Tangga). The group builds community spirit among domestic workers, who form a marginalized and vulnerable community, through intellectual, emotional, self-esteem, and other capacity building exercises prepared to prevent and handle day-to-day problems. Improving their skills also strengthens workers’ bargaining position with their employers, reducing occurrences of unjust and unequal relations.

RGP conducted activities in four OPERATA communities, based on need: Depok I, Rangkapan Jaya-Sawangan, Parung and Kemuning. RGP met with domestic workers using the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) method. Domestic workers identified their problems, learned how to analyze and anticipate them, and shared lesson learned from their problems. The FGD method allowed participants to share experiences, feelings, ideas, problems, suggestions, and solutions without pressure or intimidation. The environment was also non-threatening. Meetings were home-based, and some took place after the regular Moslem meeting of Qur’an study. Together participants were trained in handicraft making, cooking, art appreciation (singing and dancing), and barber skills. They were happy to build their self esteem and gain confidence to prove wrong the societal view that domestic workers have low standing in society. They are proud because they can do anything they wish to enrich their spiritual, emotional and talent.

The OPERATA communities also develop the realization of the right to work safely, earn proper salaries, insist on reproductive rights, and get free education. RGP’s Non Formal Education program for domestic workers meets these needs and interests. Forty five domestic workers, to date, participate in the NFE package B and C (Junior and Senior High School) and Literacy programme.

RGP collaborates with stakeholders, employers, government and society. They are also active in community gatherings in target areas to gain programme support and spread the word on the basic rights of domestic workers as women, workers, citizens, and human beings. RGP invites employers and the community leaders to gatherings in order to gain support and permission, and hear suggestions, on initiatives.

Gender and Ethnic Components:
100% of domestic workers in the project are women, 75% are single and 25% are married. RGP designed the programme through a consideration of the women workers’ needs and interests as women, workers, and human beings. Women suffer from multiple, simultaneous discriminatory factors. They come from poor families and lack education, are discriminated against in their
families and in workplaces, and are seen as low-status members of society, meaning that violence against them is seen as normal. Some married workers in RGP’s community in Parung-West Java were victims of economic, sexual, and physical violence by their husbands. For example, unemployed males encourage their wives to work in public sphere to earn money and become the single breadwinner of the family. They treat their wives badly and want money for drinking and gambling. Young domestic workers also experience violence. One domestic worker was molested by her uncle. Some are sexually harassed by male employers in the absence of their female employers. RGP helps victims find counseling.

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