
Best
Practices
Inspiring
Indonesia

Through Weaving, Empowering Women

By Adinindyah





The two women stood face to face, having a dialogue without any sound. One took a piece of paper full of numbers scribbled down and a metal ruler in 30 cm size. Another one held a tote bag that has just finished being sewn. Around her neck hung a cloth measuring tape. Several times she put the meter into the body bag, her fingers forming symbolic numbers. The first woman was likewise. She matched the record number in the paper, and measured the new bag. Her hands showed different figures.

Both re-examined the notes in the sketch-drawing. The second woman, Quratul Aini (49) who was used to be called as Mrs. Eni, smiling shyly. She was wrong in reading size. As she blushed, she brought her thumb and fore finger together, then touched the tip in her dimples, her mouth formed the word "sorry." The other woman, Dian Ritri Pratiwi (25) slowly said, "Read the size more carefully ok."

Bu Eni is the backbone of Lawe's product development. Although having hearing and speech impaired, Mrs. Eni is very skillfull at sewing. She was able to realize a simple sketch doodled into a beautiful woven bag. Ability defeats limitations. Besides her work as a seamstress, Mrs. Eni is also a teacher for students of deaf and speech impaired School (SLB) who intern at Lawe. In fact, she often becomes a resourceperson for students who have college tasks' or write a thesis about Lawe.

Sample of bags made by Mrs. Eni will pass through the counting process raw materials, pricing and brief market research. If it is worth it for sale, examples will be distributed to the other women artisans, most of whom work in their homes. They will make prototype products based on samples made by Mrs. Eni.



"This prototype products are then considered in the continuation of production process. If the results meet the quality standards that have been established, mass production will be carried out. If not, the manufacture of prototype products will be repeated. In fact, it could be improved with a more simple design. This would enable artisans with limited ability to take part in production," said Dian Ritri Pratiwi who acts as head of production at Lawe and was responsible for the entire long process of production.



Lawe it self is a social enterprise founded by a group of women in Yogyakarta in 2004. Handicrafts and merchandise products made from woven fabrics have been produced by the enterprise for eight years. Businesses that they do are not just simple business. There are social missions to be achieved, namely the preservation of weaves and traditional fabrics, as well as, in particular, women empowerment.



Empowering women is a very strategic option to increase family's welfare. Women are the spearheads of the household's economy. If women can be empowered, family then automatically can be saved. The indicators are simple, it is always the woman who thinks about the fulfillment of the basic needs of the family, for example, asking in rhetoric on "what are we going to eat today?" If she can answer that question then basic needs of the family is fulfilled.

Discrimination and limited opportunities experienced by women is indeed a particular concern. Especially in the situations of poverty and disaster, the position of women as victims and bearers are the greatest, thus need to be strengthened and opportunities need to be opened.

The methods are varied, but the basic thinking when building the working systems at Lawe is to give attention and appreciation to the limitations of the women artisans.





One of the women artisans' limitation is that many who do not have flexibility to be mobile. The reasons are many, because of having small children or living just down the hill away from the town. Or, because of having no means of transportation.

However, the working system built in Lawe still enables them to work and earn an income. They can work from home with a flexible time management.

As for the limitations of skills, in addition to the organized training in tailoring, Lawe makes a fair production process and design, as Dian elaborated above. Thus, no women are left behind in the production process just because of her lacking skill in sewing compare to other artisans. The spirit of collaboration is more dominating than competition between artisans.

Along the way, some of the women artisans began to flourish. Some borrowed capital to replace her old sewing machine into a sophisticated new sewing machine with higher speed and more stitches models. There is also some who borrowed capital to enlarge their workplace. The artisans can take advantage of Laras Usaha Mulya Saving and Loans Cooperative (KSP) initiated by Lawe to obtain loans for working capital with easy terms.

One of the craftsmen who use the services of the cooperative, Mbak (informal way to greet older sister) Kustiyah (40). She is one of the sidekicks of Lawe'sproduction line. Less than five years after training on craft organized by Lawe, Mbak Kustiyah has its own tailor business. If you come to her workshop, immediately it can be seen that the space is no longer able to accommodate her materials and her sewings. "Yeah, the result is not bad. I am able to collect money to build a house in the village," said Mbak Kustiyah with a happy face and a little bit embarrassed. Proud mixed with being shy.

The early involvement of Mbak Kustiyah was actually somewhat unplanned. "I was taking my chance to register for craft training held by Lawe right after the Yogyakarta earthquake in 2006. I didn't have any thoughts, I was the latest participants and then was assigned to be in the last group. And again, I registered quite late," said Mbak Kustiyah energetically with a humorous expression.

After training and being involved in the production process, Mbak Kustiyah continue to develop herself. Her sewing skill is increasing. No one guessed, this artisan is later become trainer for the novices. She was sent to train women in Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara (NTB), some time ago.



Another story, Elzalita Prastyani (31). Mother of two children, which one of them is still a baby, is actually quite busy with her work as a committee of saving and loan cooperatives for artisans and members of Lawe's marketing team. However, her will to develop is so huge. In between available times, she was still willing to learn a design that is not part of their responsibilities.

Elza's learning outcomes is exceptional. Some time ago, she won the award in Lurik Product Design Development in a provincial level (Special Region of Yogyakarta/DIY). She then had the opportunity to attend assistantship of the Department of Industry and Trade DIY for a month. There, she learned the brushes technique which is now emerging in Japan. At Lawe training last end of October 2011, Elza became one of the instructors to pass on her new knowledge.

For some artisans, Lawe then developed to be more than a workplace. Rather, it is an entrance to livelihood and opportunities that can be very different from the original plan.

Just look at the experience of Kris Isdani (25) as known as Danik.

Danik started working as a part-time seamstress when Lawe get large orders. After a while, she became a permanent one. But, when given the choice, she instead want to join the mobile team. "I do not stand being behind a sewing machine. I would rather assigned to go somewhere else, anywhere is no problem as long as I can see the road," said Danik.

Now, Danik no longer sitting behind a sewing machine. Every day she was on the street on her motorcycle to shop for raw materials, sending deliveries to the artisans, as well as picking up the finished product. Her job is not yet finished. She must also supervise delivery of the package to the cargo.





Interesting to know that a person's potential is often far buried in routine work, waiting for a chance to be mined. Agustin Nurhayatie (27) for example, has a hobby of counting. Used to be called as "Miss Cost" as her main task is to calculate detail of the use of raw materials and production costs. The "Miss Cost" was not only fond of number, but also details of knick-knacks. When Lawe is about to make accessories product line, she is the most excited person.

It did not take too long for the "Miss Cost" to develop herself. Briefly she supervised the production process and became trainer for accessories product made from weaving scraps, sharing new skills to 30 women as training participants. Still there are many names and stories about the empowerment of women after joining in Lawe.



All the raw materials were unloaded and lined up on the floor. There are glass beads of various motifs and sizes, colorful woody beads, woven rag that has been processed into cloth bead, tens of meters of leather strap. Then, she took the position, sitting in the corner of the room that was left, preparing to make a design. Her eyes dilated as she asked, "what are we going to make? How is the composition of the color? "

The story of a Islamic Education Center (Taman Pendidikan Al Qur'an/TPA) teacher, Suparmi (29) who can travel deep into Kutai, East Kalimantan, will continue to be remembered and encouraged the successor of women artisans in the future. She is becoming an inspiration about the ability to go beyond limits. If in the past, Suparmi would get car sick only by sitting in the car for a few minutes, not to mention hopping islands by planes for hours. However, her passion and open opportunities make Suparmi pay no attention to the car sick problem.

Also the story about Fitria Werdiningsih (32) who was able to bring Lawe products in the biggest handicraft exhibition in Indonesia in 2007, INACRAFT that can be a benchmark of collective and individual achievement. It can act as abilities' baseline to determine the next steps, exhibitions in Vietnam and around Europe, while preparing products for export. In the spirit belongs to Fitri, there is no option of going back. It is a matter of keep forging.

Lawe is like paving the way for the women to develop talents. And, the open talent automatically increase the capacity of the enterprise. A feedback process that is dialectical and beneficial to all parties.

However, is the whole story of women's empowerment only dealing with the processing of *lurik* woven fabrics and revolving in Yogyakarta alone?

Apparently, not. Sisterhood of Lawe program involving female woven lover throughout Indonesia is the answer. The goal is to replicate Lawe's work.

The woven lovers are encouraged to be new entrepreneurs. Together with Lawe, they are invited to build their own brand, with the support of product development and production processes from Lawe.

One of them, Harining Mardjuki (41), the owner of Daughter of Klaten brands, has developed *endek* Bali weaving combined with Klaten and Yogyakarta's lurik. Now she is combining her products with processed plastic waste from the housewives from Pugeran village, Yogyakarta.

Andi Tenri Paweli (40), is another examples. This architect of Kalla Group creates Dalle, Beautiful Bugis brands that highlighted the woven clothes of South Sulawesi as Makasar's distinctive products.

There are so many things experienced by women who are involved in Lawe. Interestingly, all stories came with the same flavor, excitement. "Choose the job that you like." This sentence is always circulating in Lawe. Love what we do first. Whatever gets in the way will then be overcome, with a cheerful heart.

Lawe's option to develop woven fabrics as well as empowering women was not a made up story. In many traditions and cultures in this archipelago, woven cloth and women are two inseparable things. It is the hand of the woman who is capable of forming a smooth and beautiful woven fabric. And now, through the woven fabric as well, these women find their strength and life path.



Adinindyah

The love of Adinindyah, who is often called as Nin, towards Indonesian women and woven fabric has made her continue to develop weaving-based products. Not only Lurik, the woven fabric from her hometown, Nin, an architecture graduate of Gajah Mada University, is also developing products made from other regions' woven fabric. Say from Bali, West Nusa Tenggara, East Nusa Tenggara, Southeast Sulawesi (Wakatobi and Kendari), Klaten, North Sumatra, Riau, and West Kalimantan. Nin did not want the diversity of Indonesian culture become extinct and history. She said that Indonesia, a nation rich in the diversity of culture, should have been capable to be prosperous through its traditional woven fabric.

Supported by a joint capital with some of her friends, Nin founded Lawe. Lawe is the house for anyone who loves and wants to develop Indonesian weaving for the welfare of Indonesian people, especially the women. The house has a soul of service, dedication, and a big dream for Indonesian culture and women.



Through Nin hands and thought, Lawe created many products such as handbags, home décor, and other knick knacks. Every product being produced is a contribution to the lives of many women and to the development of Indonesian culture. Her endless and persistent struggle over the years since 2004 is finally fruitful. Indonesian woven fabric is increasingly recognized and in demand by many people. Nin is often invited as a speaker to share her experiences to many groups. Her products begin to be targeted as export products. Lawe start to participate in international level exhibitions without leaving the national market.
Nin inspired by the words of Ismail Serageldin :

No man is an island,
And no society can remain isolated from the world.
Together,
let us think of the unborn,
remember the forgotten,
give hope to the forlorn,
and reach out to the unreached.
With bold and thoughtful actions today,
We can lay the foundation for better tomorrow...