

Stories from the Field



“Instead of tears of sorrow, I now give tears of thanks. I can now support my family fully”.

- Kasitun, a soybean farmer from
Trenggalek, East Java



Kasitun tending her soybean plot in Kedung Sigit village
(Photo: PRISMA/Nina FitzSimons)

From Tears of Sorrow to Tears of Joy

Soybean nurseries providing opportunities for women farmers in East Java

Kasitun is standing beside her plot of land looking at her soybean crop. She is subdued as she tells her story. “A year ago my husband died right here”, says Kasitun pointing to the small path leading to her 0.12-hectare lot. “He was struck by lightning while working in the fields and died instantly. I am a widow and have no choice but to take his place as head of the family”.

Kasitun is 60 and lives in Kedung Sigit village in the hill district of Trenggalek, East Java. Her wooden house is modest, with cement floors, no fridge and a firewood hearth where she cooks for her extended family. Kasitun has two married sons, one of whom still lives with her. “My son and daughter-in-law are blessed with twin girls and they live with me”, says Kasitun pointing to her grandchildren playing in the yard. “I had to take over cultivating my husband’s land to help support my family. I did this by joining a Farmer Group”.

The Tunggal Semi II Farmer Group is part of an initiative being trialled by PRISMA, an Australian and Indonesian government supported rural development program. PRISMA is looking at improving services to smallholder soybean farmers with the aim of increasing their productivity and profitability. One of the ideas being tested in partnership with the district and provincial governments is the establishment of new nurseries for certified soybean seed along with training for the nursery owners and farmers.

Indonesia has a National Soybean Nursery Development Program, which funds the establishment of new nurseries. PRISMA has supported this initiative by providing technical assistance in curriculum development specific for soybeans. In the past nursery training focussed primarily on rice cultivation. Tunggal Semi II

Farmer Group was chosen by the government as a potential new nursery and the management of the farmer group underwent the new training. Yadianto, the nursery Secretary, and Parman, the Head of the farmer group, have now set up field schools in their village to train 100 farmers in good agricultural practices.

Kasitun joined the Tunggal Semi II Farmer Group as a contract farmer. “I saw a demonstration plot that Yadianto had planted and his soybean plants were very healthy”, she says. “My soybean plants only had 60 pods, whereas his had 100. When I was watching the other farmers at the field school, Yadianto invited me to join”. As a contract farmer Kasitun was given training in good agricultural practices and access to high quality seed from the nursery. If her harvest meets the certification standards set by the government, the nursery will then purchase her crop.



Tunggak Semi II Nursery Head Parman (right) and Secretary Yadianto (left) with some of their women contract farmers (Photo: PRISMA/Nina FitzSimons)

Yadianto explains that Tunggak Semi II nursery is happy to support female contract farmers. “We now have 28 female contract farmers”, says Yadianto. “I encourage women to join the field school because they already know a lot about soybean cultivation. There are also quite a lot of female headed households in Trenggalek because many men are migrant workers. By becoming a contract farmer, the women can continue getting an income”, states Yadianto. “Women also hold the household purse, so we think it is a good idea if they follow the training. That way they understand why it is a good idea to spend more money on agricultural inputs to get better yields in the end”, explains Yadianto.

In Trenggalek the normal practice for soybean farming is that men prepare the soil and the women plant and fertilize the seeds. With the establishment of the nursery there is now work available for women during post production to sort the soybean. “We only sell high quality certified seed”, explains Yadianto. “So, the soybeans need to be sorted and packed in our branded packaging. We pay our women contract farmers to do

this”, says Yadianto. “It takes about 20 women 10 days to sort 30 tonnes of soybean”, explains Yadianto. “We pay Rp.600 per kilogram and most women can sort 60 kilograms per day. That’s approximately Rp.36,000 per day (approximately \$3.60) plus food”, he explains. The nursery provides training to the women labourers in soybean classification. “They are very good at quality control. Much better than some men!” admits Yadianto.

In addition to sorting soybeans, Kasitun receives additional work as a farm labourer during the planting season. “Previously the family members did the land preparation and planting over several days or a week”, explains Yadianto, “But contract farmers need to do the planting all on the same day. So contract farmers hire day labourers to do this job. This includes women”, says Yadianto. Kasitun now works around 14 days as a labourer during the planting season and receives Rp.60,000 (approximately \$6) per day. She also works up to 10 days sorting soybeans post-harvest. The money she earns from labouring supplements her farm income.

Since Kasitun became a contract farmer for the Tunggak Semi II nursery, her income has increased significantly. “I now get more income from my soybean crop because my yields have increased using the new techniques”, says Kasitun. Yadianto confirms that since following the government training their yields have increased considerably. “Before the farmer field school these farmers were getting 900kg to 1 tonne per hectare”, he explains. “Now they are achieving 1.5 tonnes per hectare”. Yadianto feels there is still room to improve as farmers learn more and the nursery gets access to higher quality seed stock. “For example, this season we have improved our pest control and hope to achieve 2 tonnes per hectare”, says Yadianto.

The introduction of simple improvements in cultivation techniques and selling back to the nursery has provided additional income for Kasitun and the other contract farmers. “Before working with the nursery I received Rp.1 million (approximately \$100) for my harvest. Last season I received Rp.1.4 million as a result of increased yields”, she says. “I now earn more money from soybean cultivation and also additional income from labour work. This helps me support my grandchildren and I can provide them better health care and education”, explains Kasitun. “Because of this I will continue to farm in this way”, she says.

PRISMA will continue to support the government in improving the training program for new nurseries and is looking at consolidating other interventions in the soybean sector to strengthen farmers access to higher quality seeds and on-going technical expertise in soybean cultivation. Meanwhile the women working for the Tunggak Semi II nursery have finished the latest planting. “I am sure my husband is proud of my achievements”, says Kasitun as she looks over her field. “Instead of tears of sorrow, I now give tears of thanks. I can now support my family fully”.

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The Australia-Indonesia Partnership for Promoting Rural Income through Support for Markets in Agriculture (PRISMA) is a multi-year program that is part of the Indonesian Government’s long term strategy to encourage economic growth. With the support of the Australian Government, the program aims to achieve a 30% increase in the net incomes of 300,000 male and female eastern Indonesian farmers by the program’s end by providing innovative solutions to increase productivity and market access.

PRISMA focuses on agriculture sectors that are the main source of income for a large number of smallholder farmers and have strong growth potential in areas of East Java, West Nusa Tenggara, East Nusa Tenggara, Papua and West Papua. Partnering with key market stakeholders, the program help spur growth along the value chain by reducing barriers and constraints within the agriculture sector.