

## **Paskalina Baru: Building local communities in Papua**

"I used to be shy and introvert. Now, I am a different person. After becoming one of the ILO's facilitators through its Indigenous Peoples Empowerment Programme, I learnt to talk and communicate to people. Be more open to promote the application of the community-driven participatory development in my hometown, Kebar District in West Papua. Together with other facilitators, I was responsible for three tribal groups: Ileret, Mpur and Miyah.

For many years, the local community had been used with the top-down and dole-out approaches to community development. These approaches had created a culture of dependence. The local community, in particular the traditional community organizations, has never been given an opportunity to play an active role in the development of their own villages. The local community organization in this area is called Ventory.

As a result, it was not easy to convince the local community about this approach. They rejected me and the other facilitators. They refused to meet and talk to us. Even more, as the only female facilitator, I had a harder task to do. Not only that I have to change the community's mind-sets and behaviours, I also have to break the patriarchal barriers. Yet, I refused to give up since I know that this approach would benefit my families, relatives and all the community.

Thus, I regularly visited the villages, assisting the local community to strengthen their capacities and to initiate their own development initiatives. It usually took a full day to visit one village, as each village was widely separated from one another. Most of the time, due to lack of transportation, I had to walk for kilometers to reach one village. Not only in the meetings, I also constantly promoted the approach when visiting their houses and farms, learning further about their lives, their livelihoods and their needs as an effort to provide better facilitations.

Now, with a full support from the ILO, the local community of Kebar has benefited from the approach. They are more involved in the development process, they are more independent, they work together under one community organization, the Ventory, and this organization has become the equal partner of the government and other organizations in the development processes. My future hope is that local communities in Papua, in particular in Kebar, would continue to be more productive and would play a more important role in all aspects of the development process for reaching better lives. (\*)