

Breaking the glass ceiling: The story of two Nias women as the supervisor sites in the construction sector

It never crossed the minds of these two young women of Nias Island, Kiki and Lisna, that they could work as site supervisors in road construction works as construction workers have traditionally been thought of as “male territory”. But thanks to the opportunities given by the ILO’s Nias Rural Access and Capacity Building Project, these two women have been trained and now are working as site supervisors. This initiative has opened the career opportunities in the construction sector for young women on Nias.

Kiki, or Aries Eki Trisanti, an energetic 25 year-old woman from Gunung Sitoli, had the courage to apply to this position even though she had not previously worked in the construction sector. With her background as an administrative staff member in the Polonia Airport and as a teacher in a local Junior High School in Nias, she was at first quite uncertain about pursuing a new career as the site supervisor. However, after beating many other applicants in the selection process and successfully completing the 4.5-month course, her self-confidence has grown stronger.

“I started to feel empowered now that I have been trained as a site supervisor. I also feel that it is a good opportunity for me to do something for my home town - to be part of the effort to increase access to the people of Nias,” said Kiki who is now working for CV Bella, a local contractor.

Similarly, Meslina Gea or Lisna, a 23-year-old woman from Siwalobanua Dua, Nias, still could not believe she could land a job as a site supervisor. As a former computer operator and an administrative staff member in a Junior High School, she has never before thought of pursuing a career in road construction works. “I learnt a lot during the road construction training about construction techniques and management. I, together with other trainees, was closely coached to achieve the required working standards,” Lisna said.

For Kiki, the greatest challenge that she had to face was doing the real work of building a road. “I am responsible for making the concrete mix and stone masonry, while at the same time supervising the pilot rural road project. I was not so sure of myself at first, but my self-confidence has grown and my male work colleagues have appraised my performance. They said that I even do better jobs than them,” Kiki told the story with beaming eyes.

She is now capable of making good cement mixture, cold mix and stone masonry, as well as capable of providing site management for road construction. “I do not care about my skin getting darker while working directly under the sun. I am proud of myself and what I have achieved. There are still many remote, isolated villages and by increasing access, the people of Nias can improve their way of living.”

Meanwhile for Lisna, the most challenging task that she had to do was to convince her family that she was capable of doing her job as the site supervisor. Now, she works as a site supervisor for CV Central, a local contractor in Tuhemberua sub-district. “It was difficult to convince my family that I can not only do real construction works, but also the site management. Now I have proved to them that I can do this and they are very proud,” Lisna said.

Both Kiki and Lisna wished that they could set an example for other young women on Nias. “I hope that young women on Nias also believe that they are able to do many things and contribute to the society,” said Kiki. Meanwhile Lisna said that by improving access on Nias more opportunities will also be available for the people of Nias, particularly for women.

To date, there are five women out of 16 trainees who successfully passed the ILO site supervisor training and are now working as the site supervisors. (*)