

# Building self confidence from an early age: A story from Sarmi, Papua

## Location

Desa Beneraf,  
Distrik Pantai Timur,  
Kabupaten Sarmi,  
Provinsi Papua

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## Beneficiaries

Beneraf village :  
32 students,  
about 120 households

- Indonesia has made great advances in basic education with more than 94% of children aged 7-12 years attending school, but quality of education is still low and there are over 2 million children who have dropped out of school
- Teacher qualifications are still low and teaching methods that don't develop children's potential will decrease their motivation to attend school
- Increasing budget allocation for education does not mean there will necessarily be a positive impact on quality of education

The sun has just begun to shine, but Nelci Oisba has already opened her eyes. After praying she moves from her bed, then showers and brushes her teeth. Out of the shower, little Nelci, wearing her school uniform, rushes to the terrace where her mother is serving her favorite breakfast, fried cassava. Before eating the cassava, Nelci suddenly remembers something. She hurries into the bathroom to wash her hands. "Fragrant now," says Nelci, smelling her fingers. Back to the terrace, she calmly eats the fried cassava made by her mama.

At a quarter to eight, Nelci and her mama walk towards the school building, which is located not far from their home. Joining them are other mothers and children, all going towards the same place. In the school yard the children play, chasing each other back and forth. Soon Nelci is in the middle of a group of her friends. Eight o'clock precisely, four teachers gather the children who are busy playing. No more chasing, now the children line up neatly, ready to go into the classroom to start learning.

This scene maybe familiar to those living in big cities; however, this is a story from the hamlet of Beneraf, in Pantai Timur, Sarmi district, Papua. There are 120 families living in the village, which is 8 hours travel from Jayapura, the capital of Papua province.

Five years ago, the children in this village were not familiar with the habit of washing hands before eating, or bathing, praying, or even breakfast. Many children just stayed at home despite being listed as primary school students. Now, mothers proudly tell me how their children take a bath every morning, wash their hands before eating, and pray at home. They are thrilled when their children, with sparkling eyes, recount their activities at the village school.

The school is called Maju Bersama (Advance Together). This school has changed the lives of the people of Beneraf. The school was established in 2007 and is managed by the people of the village. The initial idea for the school came from John Rahail, a facilitator from Insitut Pengembangan dan Pemberdayaan Masyarakat (ICDp) Papua. The idea was well received by the people of Beneraf, Betaf and Yamna.

There were almost no obstacles encountered by John and his colleagues in introducing and developing the idea for the communities to manage their own school. This idea was quickly welcomed by the parents who missed the presence of a school for their children in the village. The Village Head even issued a decree for teachers and all the citizens agreed to use RESPEK funds (Rp100 million) for construction. The operational budget is derived from the school teachers' business of cultivating coconut oil for sale to the public. Indirectly, parents pay the school fees by buying coconut oil.

The number of pupils at Maju Bersama at its inception in Beneraf was 57. As most students have now entered elementary school, today there are 30 children studying at the school. Every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, the school is filled with children aged three to five years who gather to learn to read and count. In this school they also share their happiness and are creative while learning basic life skills, including maintaining cleanliness and health. There are four teachers- Martinus Wainok, Abby Silva, Sarah Mafud, and Sem Orthi.

Sem Orthi is a teacher in a village school like no other. He is fifty years old, and already has two grandchildren. But he is moved to teach and guide these children. Sem longs to see young people in the village study and have a bright future. "I feel happy. Now parents are willing to send their children to primary school," he said with a smile.

Similar to Sem Orthi, Martinus Wainok, the school principal, is also very grateful to see the changes that are occurring in the village. "With the school, the kids now love to learn. They can count to twenty and know the alphabet. We are delighted that the children also have self-confidence to lead the prayers at home," explained Martinus.

Neighboring villages, Yamna and Betaf, did not want to miss out. Imitating the success of Beneraf village, about 30 children from those places now attend school. The local youths have become their teachers. Similar to Maju Bersama, the students there are also learning to read, count, and sing. They are also introduced to a variety of games that hone creativity like tops, jump rope, arranging wooden blocks, and playing with stuffed animals.

It may sound simple, but the desire to send children to a higher level of school was not common in Beneraf several years ago. In the past, people didn't think of education as an investment to improve their lives in the future. The community assumed that once children enter elementary school, education became entirely the responsibility of the teachers and not parents. Enrollment rates in Beneraf from year to year show a high rate in first-grade enrollment, but decline in subsequent years; not all children continue their education to a higher grade.

Sarmi District education statistics figures seem very good. From the data in 2009, school enrollment rates for primary, junior high and high school / vocational school is above 90 percent. Figures for primary school student graduation is 90 percent, while for junior high and high school / vocational school it is above 70 percent. But ironically, there are many in vocational schools who still cannot read.

Along the trans Jayapura–Sarmi road, there are many school buildings in good condition, but some of them are devoid of students and learning activities, even on school days and within school hours. This despite the fact that there are around 6,500 registered pupils in elementary schools, 1,800 junior high school students, and about 1,500 high school/ vocational school students. Similar conditions are the true face of education in other parts of Papua and even in eastern Indonesia in general.

What is happening in Kampung Beneraf, and also in Betaf and Yamna, are changes in behavior and mindsets. The village school is a tool to realize the longing Sem Orthi expressed and also the desires of other parents, that school at a higher level will improve the livelihood of future generations.

Counting, recognizing the alphabet, playing while learning, bathing and washing hands may be simple, but in Kampung Beneraf, this shows a mindset that began to change in the community: a new hope for a bright future for the young generation of Papua. In a sandy field, Nelci Oisba still playing with her friends. With pride she shows off the writing on her uniform, "Come to school, build self-confidence!". The first step starts from the laughter and joy of these little children. ■

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