



# Stories from the field



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## Seaweed for a better life

Indonesia

Communities that depend on fishing for livelihoods and food are increasingly under threat. Overfishing and environmental degradation have made life harder. Sulamu village in Indonesia is one community facing these and other problems. Located in Nusa Tenggara Timur, or NTT, one of the country's poorest provinces, malnutrition is not uncommon in Sulamu. In recent years, aquatic catches have been declining. The availability of fresh fish has become ever more irregular. What fishers do catch is often wasted. Traditional food storage techniques in NTT are not very effective, and an estimated 25 to 30 percent of stored food goes bad.

Solutions do exist. If fish and other aquatic products could be processed, they could be kept longer, sustaining families even when catches are meager and fresh fish hard to come by. In NTT, however, fish and aquatic goods

processing was rudimentary, rarely used and the results were poor. Food security in Sulamu was becoming more precarious.

In 2011, that began to change. A team from the Regional Fisheries Livelihoods Programme for South and Southeast Asia (RFLP), an initiative of FAO and the Government of Spain, came to Sulamu. Quite by chance, the team stopped at a café owned by 41-year-old Shinta Lona, better known as 'Mama Fons.' When a consultant tasted Shinta's 'pillus' – a crunchy snack made from dried seaweed – he told her that with some improvements she could sell it in markets in the provincial capital.

With assistance from the RFLP, Shinta improved her basic recipe, increased production hygiene and received basic equipment for more professional packaging. The 'Mama Fons' brand was

born. The RFLP helped Mama Fons obtain health and safety certification and introduced the product to supermarkets and minimarkets. Mama Fons' snacks have now been featured in national trade fairs and she now supplies a leading international supermarket (Carrefour) chain.

Shinta and the RFLP have been sharing what they have learned, forming a processors group in the village. RFLP established facilitator teams consisting of district officials, members of NGOs and education institutions.

As a result of their hard work and the technical advice provided by the RFLP, Shinta and her group have seen their incomes grow. Production of pillus has expanded from 10 kg to 200 kg per week. As her business expands, she is providing more jobs for her neighbours. "Our main concern is to ensure that people in our community have employment, especially young people, and our dream is to be able to do this with a processing plant," Shinta said.

To replicate the success of Mama Fons, the RFLP and Indonesia's Marine Affairs and Fisheries Agency are working with the country's planning and development agency to produce a Road Map for Seaweed Development in the province.

In scaling up, the Road Map's authors are using some of the lessons learned through Mama Fons. Motivation is essential. Mama Fons and her group were driven by a desire to better themselves and learn more. They possessed a positive and entrepreneurial spirit.

Support needs to be ongoing. Group mentoring was crucial in helping Mama Fons overcome difficulties and generate solutions. Training without follow-up often does not bring about positive results.

Building local capacity provides a solid foundation for achievement. RFLP did this by providing training of trainer (TOT) training to mixed teams with different skill sets and involving officials, NGOs and academics. This was integral to the success of the initiative and helped facilitate sustainability and replication.

"We are happy that we can contribute to the improvement of conditions in our community," Shinta said. Success is always best when it is shared.

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## LINK

<http://www.rflp.org>

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