

## 4 *Email interview with Imas Shidiq, Chief Commissioner & Owner of Binusa Riau Persada*

**JS: Could you please briefly introduce your company — your business, background history, and so forth?**

**Shidiq:** Binusa Riau Persada is a real estate and housing complex developer which was established in 2000 in the Riau Province of Indonesia. There is good potential for this business in Riau. In addition to the high availability of vacant land, economic growth there has been very rapid. Riau's provincial revenue ranks second in the nation, and its public purchasing power is quite high. This company targets the middle-class segment of the market, in addition to offering competitive and affordable prices to the lower-income segment.

**JS: How do you think your company has made a particular contribution to the interests of women, such as by creating job opportunities for them?**

**Shidiq:** Even though real estate has generally been a male-dominated field in Indonesia, Binusa Riau Persada has maintained an equal number of men and women in its workforce (including among managers and top executives). The company recognizes the strengths of women in fields such as marketing and accounting, and has set targets for the number of women holding management positions. To meet its goals, the company focuses on equipping women with the necessary skills and knowledge they need to advance in their positions. This is accomplished through access to opportunities like training and seminars. The company also provides on-the-job training. Employees can attend the company's housing exhibitions to observe and learn from their colleagues and interact with customers.

**JS: What do you think about the social status of women in Indonesia? Do you think Indonesia has achieved equality between women and men?**

**Shidiq:** The social status of women in Indonesia is still lower than that of men. At present, Indonesia has not achieved gender equality. The United Nations 2014 Millennium Development Goals Report showed that there is a gender gap in several fields. In Indonesian law, there is no law or government regulation which treats men or women differently. However, in practice, it is very evident in public life that such differential treatment exists. Due to historical tradition and cultural influences, gender equality is not as hoped for. However, if we compare this with the situation five years ago, developments towards gender equality have been quite good.

**JS: Do you think your company will be instrumental in**

**raising the social status of Indonesian women?**

**Shidiq:** My company is a small enterprise, and cannot yet be instrumental in raising the social status of women. However, the company gives the greatest opportunities possible for women to do various types of work. If they are willing and able, women are not limited to working in the administration, accounting and marketing departments, but can also work as construction supervisors, purchasers, and even contractors or builders.

**JS: What do you think about the role of women in your country's economy?**

**Shidiq:** A marketing survey done by Markplus indicated that 77% of the purchasing decisions in Indonesia are made by women. According to Statistik Indonesia, the Indonesian population in 2014 was 240 million people, half of them female, of whom 48% are employed. There is no definite account of the number of businesswomen, but the Indonesian Ministry of SMEs stated that there were 55 million micro and small enterprises (formal and informal) in Indonesia in 2012, 60% of which are owned and managed by women. In addition to this, the survey indicated that working women do not spend their salaries on themselves, but use them for family needs. Because they take responsibility for family finances, many women work or run businesses in the informal sector (street vendors or domestic helpers at home or abroad). From this we can see that women do play a very large role in the Indonesian economy.

**JS: In Indonesia, can working women continue their career after having children? In Japan, many women give up working after having children, since our daycare facilities for working women are not well developed.**

**Shidiq:** Despite not having sufficient daycare facilities, Indonesian women can still continue their careers after getting married and having children. The typical Indonesian household consists of an extended family. One house can potentially be home to the father, mother, children, grandparents, aunts and uncles, in-laws and so on. These family members help take care of the children and do other domestic work such as cooking and cleaning. Families with sufficient finances can hire maids to help with housework and child-rearing. However, these days there is a tendency for only the immediate family (parents and children) to live in one house, and the younger generation generally have just two children (a result of the

Photo: PT Binusa Riau Persada



government's family planning policy). To anticipate these developments, Indonesia needs to provide sufficient daycare facilities, so that the participation of women in the workplace and the business world remains high.

**JS: Can your company's working mothers continue their career after having a child. If so, how can they continue?**

**Shidiq:** Yes, this is very possible. They can hire housekeepers or ask extended family members to help take care of their children.

**JS: What do you think about women's entrepreneurship? In certain areas like the garment industry or service industry, women's creativity seems to be incredibly effective. With their start-up businesses in those sectors, our economy could be revitalized. What do you think about this? Do you think women are good entrepreneurs not only in those specific sectors but in all sectors?**

**Shidiq:** Keeping in mind the large role it plays, Indonesia needs more women's entrepreneurship. In the women's business organization to which I belong (the Indonesian Businesswomen's Association or IWAPI), there are about 40,000 women who run businesses in various sectors. Most IWAPI members operate in the fields of garments/fashion/apparel, catering/restaurants, handicrafts, educational institutions (skills courses), and beauty products and services. Women are very skilled at running these types of businesses (often referred to as traditional women's work). This might be because those types of businesses are related to the domestic household role of women. However, women are also skilled at running non-traditional types of businesses, such as mining, building construction, health equipment, and others. Clearly women are able to excel in all types of businesses, as long as they are given the same chance as men.

**JS: Could you tell us about your company's future strategy? I would like to ask you how you are planning to encourage Indonesian women's social**

**activities or role in the economy.**

**Shidiq:** The company's strategy consists of: (1) product diversification (townhouses, middle-to-upper class homes, house/shop combinations) while continuing to build small homes for low-income groups; (2) cooperating with land owners to procure land (involving landowners in licensing, management, marketing, stock share, etc.), which can reduce operational costs; (3) cooperating with government and large private institutions in marketing (to secure a captive market); and (4) developing housing complexes in West Java.

To encourage the development of Indonesian women, as a businesswoman, I give opportunities to my female employees to develop themselves. I support them if they want to go into business for themselves, becoming contractors or suppliers who can supply goods to my company, or making their own housing company. In connection with my role in IWAPI, I cooperate with government institutions, large private companies, and donor agencies to organize seminars, workshops, training, and other events related to strengthening business management (targeting female business owners), leadership training, household budgeting, specific-field business management, and entrepreneurship (for women interested in going into business). In addition, IWAPI have a Savings and Loans Cooperative (with me as a secretary) to help the financing of women's SMEs. To increase the number of female micro and small entrepreneurs who get loans from my cooperative, the cooperative has joined up with banks. Other important activities include organizing exhibitions to help women entrepreneurs in selling and marketing their products. Through the various types of access given, and the skills they develop, Indonesian women will be able to improve their economic role.

**JS: Asia is now the locomotive of the global economy, as you know. In particular, Asian women will play an important role in achieving Asian economic prosperity. In this regard, do you think APEC should reinforce its measures to encourage women into the workforce and entrepreneurship?**

**Shidiq:** Yes. In my opinion, APEC must strengthen its activities and encourage more women to enter the workforce and business world. On March 24-25, 2015, a workshop was held in Jakarta about gender equality, which was attended by representatives of ASEAN and OECD nations. However, most of the representatives who attended this event were from the government rather than the business world. As a result, the outcome was not optimal for women in the workforce and business sector.

In my opinion APEC must initiate specific policies for established businesswomen as well as women who are just starting out in business, possibly by providing them with special financing loans. Such loans could not only be allocated to micro enterprises, but to small and medium-sized enterprises as well. APEC should also

initiate a policy on daycare facilities, so that women who are married with children will be able to continue their careers. In this way, their creativity and productivity will not be cut short.

I hope that APEC can act as a bridge between businesswomen from among its member nations. This could help develop the supply chain of businesses run by women. It was discovered by WEConnect International that the majority of purchasing decisions (70%) in the world are made by women, but only 1% of female-run businesses

got any benefit from this fact. This is a great disparity. I hope that more companies run by women will be able to benefit from such a supply chain as facilitated by APEC. **JS**

*Imas Shidiq is the chief commissioner and owner of PT Binusa Riau Persada. She holds an MSi in Communications from the University of Indonesia in Jakarta. She is also vice chair of Education and Training at DPP Real Estate Indonesia and head of Research and Training of DPP IWAPI (Indonesia Business Women's Association).*