

# Bakul: Contribution of Rural Women to Family Economy through Informal Sector Activities

Komunitas: International Journal of Indonesian Society and Culture  
9(1) (2017): 136-142  
DOI:10.15294/komunitas.v9i1.8906  
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p-ISSN 2086 - 5465 | e-ISSN 2460-7320  
<http://journal.unnes.ac.id/nju/index.php/komunitas>

UNNES JOURNALS

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Received: 27 November 2016; Accepted: 24 February 2017; Published: 30 March 2017

## Abstract

Economic contribution of bakul women (small tradeswomen) was manifested in informal sector activities such as merchants, laborers, homeworkers, and family workers. Rural society activities indicated cooperation between men and women. One job conducted by women in informal sector was bakul. The work is a progress for women regarding work division; however, it is also a challenge, especially for children education in the family. Research location was in Gunungpati Subdistrict, Semarang City. The research was conducted using qualitative approach. Research result shows that bakul women worked in informal sector to fulfill economic need of the family because the income from their husband was insufficient to fulfill daily needs thus they tried to look for additional income. Various types of empowerment for bakul women had been conducted either from the internal of bakul itself or from external. Through the empowerment, they were able to fulfill their daily needs such as to buy clothes, to send their children to school, to buy rice and side dishes, and even to give donation for the provision of basic needs.

## Keywords

bakul women; economic contribution; informal sector

## INTRODUCTION

Currently, woman issues are an interesting topic to discuss. Women not only have traditional roles in giving birth (reproduction role) and taking care of household, but also social roles related to their career in economy, social, family, and politics supported with high level of education. Traditionally, women seems to be restricted and placed in passive position as a supporter for their husband's career (Eswaran 2013; DeHaas 2010; Datta 2012; Ames 2013). The limited role of women in reproduction and taking care of household has made them

to be identic to dedication to husband and children. Moreover, modern women are demanded to have high level of education, and play active and critical role (Anthopoulou 2010; Arizpe 2014; Kabeer 2011).

Principally, the role of women and men are similar, except for reproduction function, which is the nature of women that cannot be replaced by men, such as being pregnant, giving birth and breastfeeding (Balasubramanian 2010; Haggblade 2010;

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Movahedi 2012). Stereotype differences are hereditary formed in socio-cultural order of the society. In the development of women empowerment, the basic issues are low participation of women in the development, discrimination to women, low life quality, and low GDI (Gender-Related Development Index) and GEM (Gender Empowerment Measure) values (RI 2005). Bappenas (2007) reported that one way to evaluate the achievement of MDGs target in women empowerment is using indicator of women contribution in wage employment despite the tendency of differences in wage between male and female who work in informal sector.

According to Moerpratomo (1999), women have potential that can become one of basic capitals of development and can be developed as productive forces. However, without planned development, this huge number can turn into national burden. Indonesian women have great gait in the development. Their economic contribution is mostly manifested in informal sector activities for example as a merchants, laborers, homeworkers, and family workers. As well as, rural society activities indicated cooperation between men and women.

One of jobs conducted by women in informal sector is *bakul* (small tradeswomen). The work is a progress for women such as in terms of work division; however, it is also a challenge, especially for children education in the family.

Some studies indicated that women have very important contribution in the economy of farmer family in rural areas. A research by Abdullah (1991) on economic contribution of women showed that women still helped their husband after conducting economic activities as *bakul* in certain works such as looking for grass for cattle, washing clothes, and cooking. However, if they have a grown up daughter they could replace their parents' works.

A research result by Megawangi (1999) found that, in reality, there were more women worked in informal sector with significant contribution to household economy. Sumardjo (1988) found that women contri-

bution in household economic activities in rural areas in Java cannot be ignored. A research by Hagul (1985) showed that the poorer the family the higher the percentage of economic contribution of women. The role of women as economic support is increasingly important when the family is poorer. Therefore, the position of poor rural women is stronger against their husband than those rich women, especially during decision making.

Research result indicates that woman contribution to the family was bigger than that of man. An informant with the help of their bigger daughter was able to gain more income than the husband who was a farm worker. The involvement of woman in public activity, especially in *melinjo* chips production was aimed to add income from the husband and to help in fulfilling family needs. On the contrary, women with husband who has non fixed salary, such as who work at construction and farm, will be the main source for family income. However, most of them are reluctant to mention about their contribution and economic activities. If their contribution is higher than men generally they will be lower than men.

More than a century ago, Kartini had stated that every woman should have economic independence in order to have power and position in domestic relationship, family, and social environment. It is undeniable that the role of women in building economic resilience already has the impact in informal sector, particularly. Women that have almost equal population to men, is potential human resources for development. Based on data from Bureau of Statistic (2010) almost half of Indonesia's population is women. With women population in Indonesia reaches 118 million people (49.7%), they have significant role in the development and a potential asset for nation as well as significant contributor in economic development, either as agent of change or subject of the development.

Research location was in Gunungpati Subdistrict, Semarang City. Research informants were women who worked as *bakul* originated from Gunungpati Subdistrict

and traded at Sampangan Market, Semarang. The location was selected since it has more *bakul* women who traded in markets in Semarang City compare to those originated from other area. Informants were determined through snowball sampling and criterion-based sampling (Danim 2004).

Qualitative research was used to describe contribution of *bakul* women in public activities in terms of their income and contribution to family economy, number of hours (form of the use of time) for activities in informal sector, decision making in family, and forms of *bakul* women empowerment. Regarding to the research, unit of analysis was individual (*bakul*), their closest family included husband, parents, and children. Assumption used was that individual action regarding decision to work in informal sector was supported by all family members, following Weber's (Weber 1964, Ritzer 2003, Nugroho 2000) terminology of methodological individualism. Qualitative data analysis was conducted on information about incidences or events as well as motivation underlying social action of actors in conducting public activities.

Women from lower layer tend to use their time to look for a living by working in the higher layer of those with higher income. It is related to the poor condition of a family that rely on human power as the only economic resource; therefore, in order to fulfill the economic needs of their family they have to work longer because the income is very small or low.

Income source from female worker cannot be ignored since almost all household needs came from their wage. The involvement of women in earning a living put them in dual position as a wife, a mother of their children, as well as a family worker.

In the whole world, women's work is considered as low thus it is underestimated. Women's work sometimes describe as invisible since it is not statistically recorded. Their works are seen as "a help" instead of an income generator. A myth that man is a breadwinner and woman is a housewife is the normal or the best arrangement for human is still attached firmly in the society alt-

hough many evidences show the opposite. It shows that there is less recognition on the existence of women or even they are being underestimated. Generally, the public stated that woman's place is at home. Woman is not a breadwinner since it is man's duty. Although women work and earn sufficient income, their status remains as the help for men. Gender-based work division means that women are considered as secondary breadwinner in the family, whereas men are the primary one. In reality, however, the works done by women in research location was sufficiently high with long time devoted.

Type of men's work is one of causative factors for women to work. If the men's work gave enough income to fulfill family's need, they would not allow their wives to work including in informal sector. Generally, men worked as farmers, farm workers and construction workers. Since their income was insufficient to fulfill their family needs, many women worked and "helped the men" to fulfill the needs through informal sector (*bakul*). The type of work was chosen by those women due to their limitation in skill and inability to compete in formal sector. Therefore, they chose to do any work available and tried to fulfill their daily needs.

### Time Arrangement for Activities in Informal Sector

Informal sector is a business activity with no formal relationship between employers and employees; it is disorganized with no business license, using primitive technology, and relatively small capital and business rotation. Thus, it has relatively small operation scale. Formal education is not a requirement to run a business and generally, a business unit is managed by the owner himself along with his family. One of business activity in informal sector is *bakul* that mostly done by women.

*Bakul* is a small trader in the market that usually bring a crock or a container made from bamboo woven with the upper part is circle and the bottom is rectangular and smaller than the upper part. *Bakul* is used to carry goods. Generally, women

carry one *bakul* full of goods. They carry it using a scarf. Goods are carried in *bakul* and taken to the market for sale. Before public transportation exists *bakul* women carried her *bakul* by foot to Sampangan Market. But, now they use public transportation in a group or they even subscribed a public transportation every day thus they were ready to wait for the transportation in certain place to go to the market.

*Bakul* women in Sampangan Market mostly came from Gunungpati area Semarang City. There were 22 *bakul* women traded in Sampangan Market originated from village areas in Gunungpati, such as Sekarang, Patemon, Ngijo, and Sekar Gading (Kalisegoro) Villages with the highest number came from Sekaran Village.

The age of *Bakul* women in Sampangan Market was between 20 and 50 years; however, there were three women at the age of nearly 60 years. Generally, they already married with two to five children. Almost all of the women were intact family or their husbands are still alive. However, there were two of them who had no husband since their husband had passed away or they were divorced.

Generally, the level of education of *bakul* women was low, which was elementary school and only few of them graduated from junior and senior high school. The low level of education influenced their selection on works to be conducted since it was unlikely for them to have a decent (prestigious) work, especially in formal sector that required certain level of education. Therefore, they selected informal sector with no level of education requirement. With minimum skill they endure their work as *bakul*.

Various goods were carried to the market for sale. The goods could be foods or food wrappers (banana leaves). Foods carried were vegetables, such as cassava leaves, spinach, long beans, winged bean, and papaya leaves. In addition they also brought fruits, such as papaya and banana. The goods sold were not the same every day. They often changed their types of good. It could be banana, cassava leaves, long bean, winged bean, spinach, or else that adjusted

to agricultural produce in their villages.

One informant, Mrs. Poniah (a widow with two children) had been a *bakul* since she was 20 years old. Currently, she is 37 years old. Mrs. Poniah brought goods of vegetables and fruits produced by her village. Since the last two years, she added her goods with those goods she bought in Johar Market, such as mango, watermelon, melon, and orange, according to the season. She brought the foods to the market for resale along with her village's agricultural produce. According to her, this addition brought more profit and it was beneficial due to the economic demand of the family to fulfill daily needs and school tuition fee for her children who are still in junior high school (SMP) and elementary school (SD).

Types of good sold by *bakul* women usually varied because they only brought any agricultural produce produced by the village in certain seasons. If it was banana season, they would bring bananas and banana leaves as many as possible with other vegetables; as well as when durian season was coming. One busy situation occurred during fruit season (durian and rambutan). At that season, many new (seasonal) *bakul* women occurred. They competed to earn a living by selling those types of fruits, which were the flagship products of Gunungpati area. As conducted by Mrs. Komariyah who worked as *bakul* during those fruits season. As a seasonal *bakul*, she did not bring many goods for sale, specifically she only sold rambutan because she did not want to sell durian since it is expensive and she did not have fund.

*Bakul* women in Sampangan competed to earn a living by selling fruits. Both types of fruit were the flagship products of local people in Gunungpati area. As showed by Mrs. Komariyah and Mrs. Saropah who worked as *bakul* during durian and rambutan seasons. They also did not bring many goods for sale, specifically she only sold rambutan because she did not want to sell durian since it is expensive and she did not have fund. Mrs. Komariyah worked as *bakul* because she only went along with the atmosphere with assumption that she would

gain profit from the activity. Permanent (non-seasonal) *bakul* women, on the other hand, sold their goods to the market everyday regardless of the certain fruit season in their village. During rambutan and durian seasons, they would add their goods with those fruits for sale but only few of them and they did the activity every day since *bakul* was their main job.

Every day at 05:00 am, *bakul* women would leave for market by waiting for their subscribed public transportation, which is a pickup, often used to carry them. The number of the public transportation was only three. At the market, they would occupy their own place. They arranged their goods for sale while waited for their buyers. Usually, their goods sold out at 13:00 and they would return home. Regarding the transportation that took them home, they did not subscribe any transportation; therefore, they could use any transportation since their *bakul* was empty. At home, they would rest for a while before started another activity, which is preparing goods to be sold tomorrow morning.

Started at 16:00 to almost 21:00, those *bakul* waited and collected goods from their neighbors. Sometimes they looked for the goods (vegetables and fruits) themselves to farmers' house if no one delivered it to them. At night, they usually joined art (*rebana*) group activity or communal Quran reading (*pengajian*) until 23:00.

Based on the activity conducted by those *bakul*, it can be concluded that there was not enough time for them to get rest likewise to nurture and care for their children as a mother and as a wife for their husband at home. As experienced by Mrs. Sami (40 years) with two children, one in college and one in senior high school. Her husband worked as a mason. Based on the interview, she stated that, "Boro-boro masak Bu, la... wong kerjo ngene esuk mangkat sore nembe mulih (how can I cook.....I work from early in the morning until evening)". Therefore, they did not have time to cook for breakfast or lunch for their children and husbands. They could only prepare instant foods, such as instant noodle and eggs so their children and hus-

bands could cook it. Mrs. Sami only had time to cook in the evening after returning from market.

*Bakul* women who had husband and adult children could help them by cooking and cleaning their house when their mom at the market. However, for those with younger children and no husband, they had to work hard to sell their goods and take care of their children. Therefore, everyday their children went along with their mother to go to school. In addition, breakfast and lunch were prepared since in the morning. Most of *bakul* women worked in informal sector since their husbands' income was insufficient in fulfilling the daily needs; therefore they worked to help their family economy.

Generally, *bakul* women started their work by collecting goods and brought them to the market for sale. The activity was conducted by them. Their husband had less role in this activity that limited to activity of *angkat junjung* (carrying) the goods from their house to the transportation area when they were leaving for market. The husband usually did not interfere with the *bakul* matters regarding the price of the goods, buying/collecting goods, and selling goods. The husbands had their own activity, as a mason, carpenter, farm worker, or construction worker.

### Women Activity in Self-Empowerment in Informal Sector

Empowerment strategy of *bakul* women can be seen in two sides, the side of the woman herself and the external side of a woman who respect each other as human being, listen to each other as well as respect other interest and opinion. The empowerment efforts consisted of awareness, encouragement, and assistance in individual potential to be an independent yet good personality person.

The empowerment efforts were prioritized for *bakul* women who received assistance in form of loan called *Tabungan Kesejahteraan Rakyat* (Takesra), JPS fund, and other loan such as market cooperative. These women received capital assistance loan although not too often. The amount of the

loan was varied for type of loan assistance and market cooperative. However, in Public Safety Nets (*Jaring Pengaman Sosial*=JPS) the assistance was relatively the same since it is in form of revolving loan for one time only and prioritize was given to people with business, such as *bakul*, business in livestock, or in informal sector.

Based on interview with *bakul* women, they received capital assistance loan of Rp. 1,000,000 and it should be return in 10 months by installments. In reality, the loan did not use to improve or develop their business instead it was used to fulfill other needs such as to buy jewelries or for their children's school fee. As stated by Mrs. Sunariyah, Mrs. Mustakiyah, Mrs. Wagiyah and other *bakul* who received JPS fund. They did not use the fund to develop their business but for other needs. Therefore, *bakul* activities were continued as usual with no meaningful development.

### Women Contribution to Family Economy through Informal Sector

Generally, the husband of *bakul* women in Sampangan Market worked as carpenter, mason, construction worker, farmer, and other labors. However, the majority of them were worked as labor or construction worker and only few of them worked as carpenter. In addition, none of the husband owned large farm, they only worked on narrow field planted with vegetables, papaya, corn, or banana. They selected those crops since their wives could sell the yield in the market.

The income of the husband was around Rp 600,000.00 - Rp 900,000.00 per month. The income was gained from their work as construction workers or carpenter/mason. In contrast to income received by the husband who worked as farmer, *bakul* women could not determine the exact income every month from the sale of vegetables, banana, or papaya. According to them, in one period of selling they could receive income of Rp 25,000.00 - Rp 40,000.00. Therefore, if once a week, their monthly income mostly was two hundred rupiah.

Income from the husband was mostly used for school fee, such as for school

equipment (bag, book, and pen) and other needs such as clothing for certain time. The income was also used for donation if their neighbors had certain celebration (wedding or circumcision). On the other hand, the income of *bakul* women was used to fulfill daily needs because they worked for a living to help their husband and family economy thus they hoped to gain more profit. However, due to less variation in their goods, the profit was less and relatively fixed each day. As stated by Mrs. Wigati (25 years), a *bakul* from Sekar Gading and Kalisegoro, that by working everyday she only received Rp 150,000.00 - Rp 200,000.00. The money was used to buy goods and transportation every day. It was similar to other *bakul* with average income of Rp 150,000.00- Rp 200,000.00. Mrs. Sami, on the other hand, stated that she received profit of Rp 50,000.00 per day. That profit illustration was for *bakul* who brought the same goods, which was agricultural produce of their villagers. The profit was different for *bakul* who brought produce as well as fruits that were in demand. With the addition in goods, the profit was higher. As stated by Mrs. Poniah who received daily profit of Rp 75,000.00 - Rp 100,000.00.

Income obtained by *bakul* women was generally used to fulfill daily life, such as to buy groceries like rice, sugar, and side dishes (*tempe*, egg, instant noodle) in the market and brought them home with their empty *bakul*. Those groceries were only enough for dinner and breakfast. These women often chose instant foods since they did not have time to cook breakfast for their husbands and children in the morning or noon. In addition, part of the income set aside for saving and used to buy school supplies and daily allowance for their children. The set aside income for saving was conducted through women *arisan* (regular social gathering) activity in their neighborhood. These women usually could save more compare to other women who were not *bakul*. As stated by Mrs. Suaniyah (30 years) whom her husband worked as a mason, she usually could save about Rp.15,000 - Rp. 20,000 per week. *Bakul* women had more ability to fulfill their daily life from her work as *bakul* compare to

other women who depended only on their husbands.

Most of *bakul* women tended to have no willingness to improve their business. Although they received capital assistance in form of JPS or Takesra fund they did not use it to improve and develop their *bakul* business. Instead, the assistance fund was used for other purposes such as to buy jewelry or to renovate their house; thus, their business run as usual without any improvement.

## CONCLUSION

*Bakul* women used most of their daily time (noon and afternoon) to do their activity in the market; thus they did not have enough time for domestic activities as a mother for their children and as a wife of their husbands. Most of them worked in informal sector to fulfill the needs of family economy because their husbands' income was not sufficient to fulfill their daily needs; thus, they looked for additional income to help their husbands. Various types of empowerment for *bakul* women had been conducted either from the internal of *bakul* itself or from external. Through the empowerment, they were able to fulfill their daily needs such as to buy clothes, to send their children to school, to buy rice and side dishes, and even to give donation for the provision of basic needs. Access to resources was indicated by those women through various activities such as capital loan, skills like making snack, embroider, and other productive activities. The presence of woman empowerment, based on awareness and control dimension, indicated that they were given a chance to do their activities as *bakul* in the market. It shows that *bakul* activity was not men domination but it is mostly conducted by women. The role of woman in informal sector, in this case trading at the market as *bakul*, gives significant contribution to economy since they could help their husband and improve family economy.

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