

INDONESIAN RURAL WOMEN: THE ROLE IN AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRAK

Tugas dan fungsi perempuan dalam kehidupan sosial memegang peranan penting, akan tetapi perempuan seringkali diabaikan dalam proses pembangunan terutama pembangunan perdesaan. Dalam kenyataan hampir tidak ada perbedaan status antara perempuan dan laki-laki pada pengambilan keputusan di dalam rumah tangga, bahkan perempuan digambarkan sebagai pemimpin di belakang layar atau pemimpin informal dalam rumah tangga. Multifungsi peranan perempuan antara lain adalah sebagai ibu yang berfungsi dalam reproduksi manusia, pelaku produksi pertanian dan rumah tangga, pekerja sendiri pada pasar informal dan penerima upah dalam kegiatan produktif lainnya. Terdapat perbedaan fungsi dan tata kerja antara perempuan dan laki-laki dalam kehidupan sosial, karenanya perlakuan dan kebijaksanaan yang menyama ratakan peranan tersebut dalam hal kehidupan sosial dan ekonomi serta kesehatan seringkali tidak tepat. Situasi ini menunjukkan bahwa isu perempuan belum terrefleksi dalam proses perencanaan pembangunan. Beberapa faktor yang mempengaruhi hal ini adalah akses yang berbeda terhadap lahan, kredit dan pendidikan termasuk penyuluhan antara perempuan dan laki-laki. Beberapa hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa peranan perempuan dalam menyumbang penghasilan keluarga cukup signifikan. Kondisi ini menunjukkan bahwa peranan perempuan sebagai pelaku ekonomi tidak boleh diabaikan, bahkan diperlukan dukungan teknologi untuk menunjang peranan perempuan dalam kegiatan sosial dan ekonomi agar para perempuan dapat mengalokasikan waktunya lebih banyak pada kegiatan produktif tanpa meninggalkan peranannya pada kegiatan domestik. Beberapa negara termasuk Indonesia mempunyai pengalaman bahwa dengan mengakomodasikan lebih banyak peranan dan fungsi perempuan dalam kegiatan sosial dan ekonomi akan memberikan manfaat tidak saja kepada para perempuan tersebut tetapi juga kepada masyarakat secara keseluruhan.

Kata kunci : *perempuan, perdesaan, pembangunan pertanian*

ABSTRACT

The women involved their roles and differing positions in society, however usually women are neglected in rural development even they experience equal status in the household decision-making process and are often described as the silent head of the home or "informal" power. Their roles in this societal context cover the spheres of human reproduction and equally important agricultural and household production, self-employment in the informal market sector and as wage laborers. The work of women and men differ yet the population is treated as one undifferentiated unit in some subsequent sections education, health and economic development. It is difficult to believe that women

and men would play similar roles in economic development if their work ethic is so different. This reflected that women are not included in development planning. The reason why women excluded in development planning are they not given equivalent access to land, credit or extension services. Women also have potential to contribute to agricultural productivity beside the productivity of domestic activity is another extremely important area which should not be ignored by planners. Gender issues in development are a relatively new area of research of much importance because of its potential impact on shaping the societies of developing countries. Indonesia is in a good position to integrate rural women into development because social values in its cultures such as the Javanese already provide them with relatively egalitarian status. The lack of consideration, however, for women in the development literature reflects a need for development officials to start including them with the goal of development being one that benefit to the whole rural community. There is evidence to indicate that by eliminating barriers to women's access to productive assets, they can fully participate and be recognized as important partners in the development process.

Key words : *rural, women, agricultural development*

INTRODUCTION

Policy interest in rural women began in the early 1970s when widespread disillusionment with the effects of development policies on the agricultural sectors of less developed countries was being felt. These effects included stagnating levels of food production, nutritional decline and restructuring of rural communities fuelling massive rural-to-urban migration (Kandiyoti, 1985). These effects imply that, in countries such as Indonesia, where a large portion of the population lives in rural areas, the relationship between rural women and agricultural development is important to examine. This paper will focus on the relationship between rural Indonesian (mostly Javanese) women and development issues but draw on examples from other countries where helpful or where data for Indonesia lacks. Rural households discussed will not be restricted to a particular crop. The intent of the paper is to provide a general over view of some of the major issues for consideration by development researchers, planners and funding agents within a desirable context for development. Desirable (or utopian!) development is a process in which ecological, cultural, social, economic institutional and political facets are understood and interrelated. It should also be in harmony with the environment and be committed to the eradication of poverty. Before addressing the pertinent questions surrounding this issue, it is important to describe the women involved; their roles and differing positions in society. The question to be asked is whether women are neglected in rural development, which is answered by a review of general development literature. The results of the review lead into the next question of how development excludes women and why. Finally the basis for women's inclusion in development is established.

POSITION AND ROLE OF RURAL INDONESIAN WOMEN

Rural women are not a homogeneous group. Their position is influenced by religious, social, and political system and economic status associated with the size of landholding they occupy with their family unit. There are some general categories into which most rural women will fit. The first is women on farms which have enough land and labor to produce subsistence living and potentially surplus, which could be large or small landholdings. Farm which have the same amount of land as the previous example but have tenant status are another possible category. Women may also be part of farms that do not have sufficient land to produce enough to feed themselves. The category at the lowermost economic rung of most villages is the landless laborers who depend on agriculture for their living. These categories can be further classified by including the number that are headed by women only. One census shows that seventeen percent of agricultural households in Indonesia are headed by women (FAO's Plan of Action, 1990). It is important to identify the various strata that rural women occupy because an agricultural development plan may impact each strata differently.

Given these categories, it is useful to characterize the women and their position in Indonesian households and society. A case study prepared by Pyle (1985) of rural Java revealed many people's actions are still guided by *adat* (customary law); women's rights are basically the same as men's with respect to marriage, divorce, inheritance and property rights. They also have a considerable degree of economic independence and initiative, exercise significant social power and are not subordinate. Wives in rural Java experience equal status in the household decision-making process and are often described as the silent head of the home or "informal" power. Many rural Javanese families are also dependent on women's financial capabilities as it is the wives who decides how the entire household income will be spent. The husbands are only consulted for major purchases. It is interesting to note that even though East Java is overwhelmingly Muslim, these religious beliefs and practices have not been a negative influence on women's traditionally high status. A study of women in the Balinese economy (Branson and Miller, 1988) also found that they can hold property in their own right and that their dignity is bound to an ability to assert some financial independence by raising pigs for sale at market, and by general market trading. Despite their independence, Branson and Miller (1988) hypothesize that women's trading activities in Bali are devalued within the Hindu structure. Rights to land ownership, however, do not guarantee women control over decision making processes. Heyzer (1986) states that even in a matrilineal society such as the *Minangkabau*, the dominant ideology implies that within marriage women maintain a subordinate position. In a nation where 366 different ethnic groups were identified around independence in 1945 (Pyle, 1985), any analysis of women in rural development must consider the Indonesian expression "*lain desa, lain adat*" (other villages, other customs).

Their roles in this societal context cover the spheres of human reproduction and equally important agricultural and household production, self-employment in the informal market sector and as wage laborers. Women as bearers and socialize of children are primarily responsible for child care and education in the form of transmission of skills and knowledge. Household production, according to a study in Java (Cloud, 1985), includes all goods and services produced within the home for family consumption or market sale such as food processing and cooking, cleaning, water fetching, fuel gathering, health care, house building and maintenance. In a study of poor Javanese households, it was observed that during harvesting men may remain at home, cooking and babysitting so that their wives are freed to harvest. Also included in household duties is the care of subsistence plots or gardens if available. In addition to domestic responsibilities, Indonesian women have central roles in labor-exchange social networks, otherwise known as *gotong royong*, as they help other households with the planting, harvesting or threshing of rice, and household tasks such as cooking, child care or providing food for other workers (Heyzer, 1986).

Of equivalent importance to their domestic activities is women's role as agricultural producers, in self-employment ventures and in wage labor. In the area of production, crop operations, particularly weeding, harvesting, threshing and storage, are the domain of women. They may also tend small livestock such as pigs and poultry, and care for three crops, the products of which may be consumed in the home or sold in markets. One should note that the position of a woman in the aforementioned categories also influences her participation in agricultural production. Studies in Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Peru concurred that women in more affluent farm families devoted less time to field work and more time to cooking for hired laborers (Cloud, 1985). Self-employment in the informal market sector will include off-farm activities such as trading. Women are usually involved in small-scale trading compared with men, who are often found in large-scale trading. The main reason for this difference is that large-scale trading requires a level of flexibility and mobility that women do not have unless they are free from domestic responsibilities. Wage labor can be paid employment in agriculture or other sectors depending on the opportunities available. The extent to which rural women are involved in the two latter activities depends very much on the time that remains after their household and farm responsibilities are met and the necessity of contribution to the family income.

A REVIEW OF DEVELOPMENT LITERATURE

The societal position and role of rural Indonesian women is significant so it would seem logical that they would be included in development literature. The literature consulted includes a professional Indonesian journal, a consultant's report on Irian Jaya, an FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United

Nations) extension bulletin and a general reference on the Green Revolution. Although more literature was surveyed the trend was similar and did not warrant specific mention. A survey of three articles from Indonesian Agricultural Research and Development Journal revealed no specific mention of women. The articles dealt with the development of a horticultural sub sector, and an on-farm rubber processing unit. Given the role women play in most crop production and processing, the success of a fledgling horticulture industry or acceptance of a rubber processing unit could depend heavily on women's involvement. The next item reviewed was a consultant's report on regional development planning for Irian Jaya. Women were referred to once in the following quote under a section entitled, "The Indigenous Population", "Attitudes to work are also conditioned by the fact that, in many cultures, women do the bulk of the daily work while many men have little concept of (or enthusiasm for) working for reward" (Lavalin International Inc. *et al.*, 1988). This quote implies that the work of women and men differ yet the population is treated as one undifferentiated unit in some subsequent sections education, health and economic development. It is difficult to believe that women and men would play similar roles in economic development if their work ethic is so different. An extension bulletin produced by the FAO was the next portion of literature examined. The publication was a collection of case studies demonstrating the positive role of private enterprise in the marketing of produce from small-scale farmers in thirteen countries including Indonesia. Seventeen case studies were presented and only one was that of a female entrepreneur. This balance seems slightly lopsided given that women constitute approximately half of the world's population and that an estimate forty percent of women in rural Java are classified as small traders (Pyle, 1985). The reference on the Green Revolution turned up quite an extensive review of the impact of this event on male and female members of rural communities in Java. If this literature survey is assumed to represent the broad picture then one concludes that in many cases, women are not included in development planning.

RURAL WOMEN'S EXCLUSION FROM DEVELOPMENT

The literature survey revealed that often women are not considered during development planning so it is pertinent to examine how they are excluded from the development process and why. Generally they are not given equivalent access to land, credit or extension services. Palmer documented that women in Indonesia lost secure access of land to men when the introduction of irrigation increased the productivity of the land (Cloud, 1985). Land allocation and resettlement programs in rural Thailand distribute cultivating rights or ownership titles to male heads of households which undermines the historical ownership rights of women (ADPC-ACWF Proceedings, 1987). Limited land access also affected the Iban people of Sarawak, East Malaysia after the construction of a dam resulted in families losing

land and women losing their historical rights to land as men were given the land certificates (ADPCACWF Proceedings, 1987).

This restricted access to land has implications for access to credit as women are far less likely than men to have collateral for loans. Additionally, in rural Java, social convention considers a man's actions more binding than a woman's (Pyle, 1985). Another factor that has contributed to limiting women's access to cash by reducing earning opportunities is the expanding industrial sector alongside agricultural development; factories are out-competing women in cottage industries that included spinning and weaving; paper making; jute handicrafts; and rice and oil processing (Dulansey and Austin, 1985). Javanese women, however, are not entirely without access to credit. They can sometimes rely on informal traditional sources such as the *arisan*; a rotating savings association. Women meet on the basis of friendship, occupation or neighborliness approximately once a month, at which time each member contributes an agreed upon amount. Lots are drawn so that one member wins with a provision that no one can win twice. Once each person has won once, the group is disbanded. This network allows women to "save" money and receive a large amount at one time which enables them to invest in starting or increasing an income-generating activity.

Alongside limited access to land and credit, women are often not targeted by extension efforts. One researcher in Bangladesh discovered in one program for increasing production that extension workers trained male heads of households in how to preserve and store the new High Yielding Grain for plantation purposes (Nelson, 1979). As established earlier, this work is the women's domain so the men neither completed the task nor bothered to pass the new methods on to their wives, resulting in a shortage of seed grain the following year. Another situation arises where extension is organized for women but may still not be utilized due to its emphasis or timing. KEMAS, a community development program in Malaysia, used to concentrate its extension efforts in the area of home economics but has now shifted emphasis towards technical training (Heyzer, 1986). RISDA, the Malaysian Rubber industry Smallholder's Development Authority, began programs for women in 1978 by focusing only such activities as cooking and food processing. No project in the area of rubber cultivation, processing or marketing has been initiated, however, due to the inconvenience of location and place of training for women. Women may also choose not to attend training session attended by men because of cultural reasons (Heyzer, 1986).

REASONS FOR EXCLUSION

There are reasons underlying Southeast Asian women's exclusion from aspects of development such as land, credit and extension. Western ideology, colonialism, male opposition and difficulties faced by female researchers being among the major reasons. One problem is that many researchers, planners, and

members of funding agencies are men. Many of these men are from middle-class western background with particular views on the proper place of women that consider them peripheral to any important socio-economic process except for child care and family planning (Nelson, 1979). Many developing countries, under colonial rule, favored men when modernizing farming: cash crops were introduced for men, land was put under the private ownership of men thereby undermining the historical rights of women under traditional land tenure systems, modern education and wage labor was made available to men, and cooperatives and classes in improved production have been offered only to men (Nelson, 1979).

Successful women's programmers sometimes create hostility amongst the village men and they may oppose continuation of the programmer or co-op the activity for themselves. This sort of opposition has occurred in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and India (Nelson, 1979). The Inter-American Foundation observed that many women's projects have been less successful due to husbands' or fathers', and brothers' opposition (Dulansey and Austin, 1985). It was also proved that this opposition could be alleviated by time and women's persistence. The different social climate of Indonesia makes this sort of opposition less likely but still occurs in areas where conservative traditions of Hindu and Muslim religions are strong.

Nelson (1979) provides some difficulties that female researchers may face in studying rural women. When women research rural women in development, few of them are economists with the skills necessary to deal with women's economic roles. Some female researchers, planners and agency officials sometimes hesitate to study women, partly because they are trained by male colleagues and may have absorbed male biases and partly because they do not wish to be labeled "feminists", a stereotype label for many in the Third World as well as in the West. Depending on village attitudes, it may not be acceptable for South Asian women to conduct research while living on their own in isolated villages. It is unlikely that this would be a barrier for women in Indonesia.

THE IMPORTANCE OF INCLUDING WOMEN

The final question that must be answered is why it is important to include women in development. The answer to this was alluded to in the earlier discussion of women's roles and place in society. Development can have a significant impact on Indonesian women and their role as important family income earners; especially in female-headed households where they are the sole breadwinners or in families owning less than 0.2 hectares where women contribute one-third or more to the total family income (Pyle, 1985). Domestic and subsistence labor is unpaid therefore women must be included in development which generates income yet suits their needs. When women's income-generating work such as hand pounding is eliminated by the introduction of mechanized rice hullers, the impact on rural

incomes is devastating (Manning, 1988). Development planners must consider the impact the new technology has on displacing women's income-generating work because it particularly affects the poor sector, usually the landless laborers.

Women also have potential to contribute to agricultural productivity. Project planners who differentiate between men and women on the basis of productivity are operating off of erroneous perceptions. In Sri Lanka women's rice transplanting, in Upper Volta women's weeding and in West Africa women's cotton picking, female productivity was found to be as productive as men's labor in the same activity (Cloud, 1985). There was a case where field men had convinced farmers that Japanese-style paddy rice planting created higher yields but the method was not employed; the contracted-out teams of female paid laborers were reluctant to learn a difficult, tedious, more time consuming method without an increase in pay (Nelson, 1979). Development which provides education and training to women can enhance the productivity of all farm inputs, including even a husband's time in farm production, which was the conclusion of a recent comprehensive Indian study (Cloud, 1985).

The productivity of domestic activity is another extremely important area which should not be ignored by planners. Equipment innovation introduced in South-East Asia is usually in the interest of cash crops while food crops are still grown mainly with the use of traditional technology. This lag in research has led to a widening of income gaps and gaps in labor productivity (Nelson, 1979). Technology introduced through development agencies should attempt to improve the productivity of domestic chores so that women can choose to spend time on other income generating activities. Currently, rural women work longer days than men in order to complete their household duties and fit in any income generating work if possible. A sample of rural Javanese households owning less than one hectare of land showed that women over fifteen years of age work an average of 11.1 hours per day relative to 8.7 hours put in by men. Of this time, women spend approximately 5.9 hours per day doing directly productive work, i.e., other than firewood collection, child care and other domestic chores (Heyzer, 1986).

If the development process considered the issues of income generation and agricultural and domestic productivity for women, benefits for communities would accrue. Palmer (1975) noted that many people are convinced that women will always convert their resources into helping meet basic needs. Women involved in Bangladesh relief program used their money for such things as household affairs and necessities, education, health, children's clothing and small business ventures (Nelson, 1979). Nelson (1979) provides another example of a group of Mexican women and female laborers on Indian tea plantations who were observed spending their earnings on basic needs whereas the men were likely to spend their wages on drinking and increased purchases of radios. The consumption ethic of women means that problems such as protein-energy malnutrition, which affects ten million Indonesian, will likely take precedence over the purchase of consumer goods thereby improving the health level of

communities. Improved domestic productivity in the area of cooking, especially during harvest times, would be helpful, as women often choose to cook quick, easy and less nutritious food. Dasgupta (1977) cited by Nelson (1979) stated that several village studies showed adverse effects on agricultural production due to neglect of cooking duties. Women's work can affect the socioeconomic activities of communities.

CONCLUDING REMARK

Gender issues in development are relatively new area of research of much importance because of its potential impact on shaping the societies of developing countries. "The approach to the study of women's roles and status in a development context is not to be viewed as an end in itself but rather as a means to promoting more effective development overall". This quote is definitely a soft-pedaled appeal to include women in development compared with some of my sources such as Nelson (1979), who states at the outset that she has "an axe to grind" and simple justice demands that it be done. Indonesia is in a good position to integrate rural women into development because social values in its cultures such as the Javanese already provide them with relatively egalitarian status. The lack of consideration, however, for women in the development literature reflects a need for development officials to start including them with the goal of development being one that benefit the whole rural community. Programs that are primarily geared to assist and educate women in a Western home economics vein show a limited awareness by Western "experts" of women's role as producers not solely as reproducers. There is evidence to indicate that by eliminating barriers to women's access to productive assets, they can fully participate and be recognized as important partners in the development process.

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