



Governance Brief

Gender Equity Revealing the Reality for the Women of Jambi

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In recent years, the term 'gender' has become a hot discussion topic in various forums and media. Many development sectors require gender analysis as a component of a program's implementation. However, even today, many people still equate gender with sex or even, as a narrower definition, with women. This is particularly true in regions, where gender has not yet commonly been discussed, such as Bungo and Tanjung Jabung Barat (Tanjabbar) districts, Jambi. This common idea is not surprising given that more women are adversely affected by gender inequity in the family environment and society than men. Thus, when gender is discussed, one might think that gender is identical with women's issues.

What is gender?

Robert Stoller (1968) introduced the term gender into social scientific discourse to distinguish between the biological characteristics of humans and other socio-cultural issues. In summary, gender is the different functions and roles played by women and men, which are shaped by our environment. Gender has much to do with prevalent perceptions and norms about how women and men are considered to be either in line with, or deviating from, local social and cultural values. Thus, gender differs from one place to the next and changes over time.

Data taken from the field shows that many people still confuse gender with either sex or nature's will/'fate' (locally called *Kodrat*). For example, if a woman does a job, which is locally considered to be a man's job, this is seen as going against 'nature'. This is in fact an inappropriate interpretation because *kodrat* means the biological characteristics, not social constructs within our environment like jobs. *Kodrat* is constant over time and place, and its function is considered to be unchangeable. The biological characteristics (*Kodrat*) of a woman, for example, are that she has a womb, a vagina and breasts, whilst a man has testicles, a penis and sperm. On the other hand, the ability of someone to do a job and their right to choose the time, location and type of job are matters of gender.

However, as a result of these biological differences, common perceptions and norms have developed in society that men have a certain social function, which is different from that of women. In Jambi, women's roles have been seen as synonymous with domestic tasks such as cooking, cleaning the house, rearing children etc., which were not valued as productive work, but were instead seen as a 'wife's duty'. These women, who did not have a 'lunch-break' in their work, were considered 'just' housewives, or merely 'joining their husbands' in formal census data. Their list of duties, which may run for 20 hours in a day, has put women in a weak economic position, with the result that women also have a weak position in controlling, accessing and influencing decision-making processes both within the family and society.



A gender perspective in the regional development process

As has already been explained, the different treatment of men and women in their environment has often caused various forms of gender unfairness, with the primary victims being women. The results of workshops in Bungo and Tanjabbar Districts, followed by a series of discussions in two villages, Sungai Telang and Lubuk Kambing, revealed that women experience various types of gender inequity. Both directly and indirectly, this has restricted development in the region as the patriarchal culture precluded women from participating effectively in the process. If the existing social structure gave more opportunities to women to participate in policy making processes, this would also ensure better use of more of the region's potential, hitherto 'buried' along with the voices of women. Would the development process not accelerate more quickly if the creative resources of men and women were equally used, rather than just those of men?

The discussions with several government agencies in the two districts, Bungo and Tanjabbar, reveal that regional development programs and projects are not gender-sensitive. The level of women's participation in the programs is also very low. Almost 80% of the female staff in regional government agencies, who attended the workshop, do not know about any programs running in their respective institutions because they have never been involved in decision-making or in on-the-ground project implementation. They are in the main, administration or finance staff, or staff of programs related to women's issues, such as mother and child healthcare or *PKK* ('Family

Welfare Empowerment' programs), a type of domestic program for women. This problem is further illustrated by the nationwide results of the 2004 general elections, where female representation in the legislative bodies was a mere 11.6%, and rising to 19.8% in the Regional Representative Assembly (*DPD*).

In order to better understand how gender inequity has obstructed the development process towards a prosperous society, we will now examine the forms of gender inequity, which exist in daily life in Jambi. Some of these observations may apply in other regions in Indonesia as well. The forms of gender inequity are as follows:

(1) Subordination

People in rural communities in general consider men more important than women, meaning that boys are given priority over girls, particularly in education. National data shows that 65% of children who drop out of school are girls. Likewise, the reality for females across the globe is that the percentage of uneducated girls over the age of 10 (11.5%) is twice that of boys, and that 65% of the 900 million illiterate people in the world are women.

Many interpretations of customary (*adat*) laws, religious teachings, societal rules and bureaucratic regulations still subordinate women. Several studies have been done examining how development programs in some Asian nations have marginalised and impoverished women (Shiva, 1991; Mosse, 1996). One example is the 'green revolution' program, which eliminated rural Indonesian women from rice harvesting work in paddy fields using small reaping knives (*ani-ani*), because the program introduced superior rice seeds whose harvest required sickles (used by men). Over time, the job of harvesting rice in paddy fields shifted to becoming a job synonymous with men, resulting in men getting larger wage payments.

This is also the case in Jambi, where a woman's daily wage (US\$2.2) is lower than a man's daily wage (US\$3.3) for the same work in agricultural lands. Ironically, the women's work is not infrequently better or heavier than that of the men. This difference in wages is founded on the perception that women's work is lighter than men's work, and that women (wives) are only 'additional' bread-winners, and as such do not need to be paid as much as the chief bread-winners, translated as meaning men (husbands). This interpretation ignores the central position of local women in rice (and other kinds of agricultural) production.

The subordination of women that commonly develops in such a patriarchal culture places women in a disadvantageous position in social, economic and political fields. Results of discussions with villagers prove that a weak economic position has a significant impact on communication and negotiation processes in decision-making forums, whether in the household or society. In simple terms we also can offer the analysis that if women's and men's gender roles were no longer so differentiated, improvements to both the economic position of households and the macro-economy in regional development would be achieved more quickly, because of equal opportunities for women and men in getting the same benefits and priorities from the results of development.

(2) Negative stereotype

Nearly 90% of the opinions expressed in the Jambi workshops included negative labels for women, including:

- Women were considered emotional (1 part thought, 9 parts emotions) and irrational if they vociferously voiced opposition to something or defended their opinion, whilst if men did the same this was seen as being firm.
- Women were considered physically and mentally weak, and as such unable to lead. For example, women are commonly unacceptable to become a *ninik mamak* (a customary leader). In fact, customary rule itself has never stated that a *ninik mamak* has to be a man. The criteria for becoming a *ninik mamak* are honesty, understanding and abiding by religious rules and customary (*adat*) rules, understanding and being willing to help community members, all of which could be fulfilled by a man or a woman. Has there never been an honest woman who understands customary and religious rules? Of course there have been many. However, because this norm has existed for decades, a perception has emerged that the position of *ninik mamak* is a man's 'prerogative'.
- Women do not need to attend customary (*adat*) meetings. It is common that women are entirely absent from customary meetings. Why is it a problem? Our logic is that, if women were involved in decision-making processes, there would be an opportunity to discuss women's interests and issues, which is also part of the common (public) interest. Do women not know more about women's issues? If they have never been involved in decision-making about issues related to or affecting them, is it not possible that things men have considered insignificant are in fact extremely important to women? It is



also not inconceivable that customary *adat* decisions may disadvantage women because of the absence of women to express their opinions in such forums. An example of a disadvantageous customary *adat* rule is that the sanctions for adultery only apply to women: a woman must leave her home, only bringing the clothes on her back and must be divorced. Meanwhile, the *adat* rule does not clearly specify any punishment for adulterous men.

- Men are the bread-winners and the mainstays of the household. Workshop participants in Jambi for example, almost universally and spontaneously stated that women were 'additional' bread-winners in the family. In the reality of daily life, the wages received by women outside of the home are an important source for fulfilling household needs. It is not rare that a woman's income even exceeds a man's (particularly if subsistence income is included). This of course does not need to be an area of competition or comparison between husbands and wives, girls and boys; rather it would be beneficial if there were equal gender relations that regarded the work done by each person as important for the household.

(3) Marginalisation

The common perception of local society lays domestic work on women's shoulders and public responsibilities on men's. This has left women in a weak position in terms of getting more access to external information and economic resources, because their household duties take so much of their time, energy and thoughts.



The current legal system and bureaucracy in our country also increasingly marginalise women in accessing economic resources such as land, credit and markets. For example, the banking bureaucracy is such that women are unable to get loans without their husbands' signatures. Likewise, in the business world, women who manage businesses cannot get a company tax number and a legal permit to expand their businesses without written approval from their husband, as the 'legally responsible party' of the family. Our government's policies clearly do not offer gender equity and women are continuously marginalised by their lack of access to the economic resources mentioned above.

What commonly occurs in Jambi, as in other part of Indonesia, is that agricultural intensification programs are focussed only on male farmers. In the main, agricultural information sessions held in villages only invite 'household heads' (a term long since synonymous with 'men', as also stated in the marriage law No. 1/1974) to offer information and assistance programs, such as agriculture loans. Whereas, in fact nearly 90% of women in these two villages (Sungai Telang and Lubuk Kambing) state that they are the ones who work most in the rice fields and agricultural lands, whilst many of the men go to the forests to harvest timber for periods of time, leaving their fields.¹ At those times, women are automatically responsible for all of the work, both in and outside of their households. If information only reaches the men, whilst the key actors (women) are not directly or actively involved, how can the targets of agricultural programs possibly be achieved?

(4) Excessive workloads

As is the case for rural agrarian women in general, women in Jambi have excessive workloads. In Sungai Telang and Lubuk Kambing, women with status as 'housewives' (*Ibu Rumah Tangga*) or 'following their husbands' (*Ikut suami*), for example, note at least 20 types of daily work required of wives/mothers, not including social activities such as 'mutual self-help' (*gotong royong*), prayer activities (*yasinan*), and other 'non-economic' work placed on women's shoulders by rural society. Women's sleep and rest periods are shorter than men's, resulting in women having insufficient time to discuss issues outside their routines such as attending village meetings or attending important meetings in customary community institutions (*lembaga adat*), a forum of information exchange among villagers. If domestic workloads, for instance, could be divided equally between female and male family members, then the wife would have more opportunity to develop her potential beyond her domestic routines.

It is not uncommon when women express their intelligence, independence and ability to make useful decisions for themselves and their families, that they are considered to be competing with their partners and violating their 'proper position' as women. A common phrase always heard from male workshop participants is 'Heaven forbid if gender-awareness makes wives forget to serve their husbands' coffee and leave the household in disarray'. It sounds trivial, but this simply shows us that it would seem that even the lightest work - making coffee - is the unequivocal duty and responsibility of women. Likewise, it seems to be women's responsibility to guard the household's happiness, and the integrity and peace of the family.

The aim of the concept of gender equity is not to position women above men or to avenge unfair treatment in the past, but instead to create balance and equity in the relations between the two parties. By creating balanced and equitable relations, both men and women have the right to choose the work they prefer, and to divide housework, the results of which are for mutual happiness, and to have the opportunity to develop their abilities and actively participate in decision-making processes which affect them.

(5) Marital Violence

There are various forms of violence inflicted on women, ranging from physical and psychological violence, within the family sphere (domestic violence) by the husband, neighbours, or

- Meetings at the neighbourhood, hamlet, *adat*, village and sub-district levels to introduce gender mainstreaming in local government action plans.
- Training or intensive workshops are required to further practice gender sensitivity in decision-making circles at the district, sub-district, village and customary community (*adat*) institution levels. Assertiveness and leadership training and further discussion regarding women's rights and domestic violence, involving law enforcement officers and policy-makers, are needed to facilitate the implementation of gender mainstreaming at the local level.
- The formulation of a relevant policy document on gender mainstreaming in regional development, laid out in a District Regulation (Perda), and the allocation of a special fund for gender mainstreaming in the District Budget (APBD) would be beneficial.
- The need to develop a database that disaggregated by sex in each district-level government agency. This database can tell us about gender relations in decision making groups, which can be used for gender analysis in district development programs.
- Periodic informal meetings to discuss gender mainstreaming in regional programs are needed. Acceleration of gender mainstreaming at the local level could be supported by local government agencies related to community empowerment and representatives from the legislative bodies.
- 'Family Welfare Empowerment' (*PKK*) groups need revitalising in order that their programs do not further domesticate women, but rather are directed towards strengthening the position of women in a balanced model of relations in decision-making processes.
- Changing the patriarchal mindset, which does not consider gender equity necessary in the division of social roles for women and men. For example, inviting women to information exchange forums held by the government, changing the time of *adat* and village meetings from evening to the afternoon, in order that women can actively contribute their thoughts and opinions in determining the prioritisation of village programs wanted by the community.

Dede Wiliam de Vries, a CIFOR researcher, and Nurul Sutarti, a facilitator from Yayasan Krida Paramitha (YKP), wrote this brief based on the findings of the ongoing collaborative research between CIFOR and the Regional Development and Planning Boards (BAPPEDA) of Bungo and Tanjabbar Districts in the Province of Jambi in a project entitled: "Collective Action to Secure Property Rights for the Poor: Avoiding Elite Capture of Natural Resource Benefits and Governance Systems". The project was funded by BMZ through CAPRI, CGIAR's Systemwide Program on Collective Action and Property Rights. The views expressed in this paper are the author's and do not necessarily reflect those of funding agencies.

Footnotes

¹ All of the data and information presented in this paper is based on primary data collected in Sungai Telang, Bungo District and Lubuk Kaming, Tanjabbar District in Jambi by CIFOR-CAPRI Team (Yulia Siagian, Yentirizal and Neldysavrino). It is also supported by the findings of workshops and secondary data collected by CIFOR team, the Yayasan Krida Paramitha (YKP) and the Regional Development and Planning Board (*Bappeda*) in the two districts.



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CIFOR's Forests and Governance Programme examines how decisions about forests and forest-dependent people are made and implemented in order to promote the participation and empowerment of disadvantaged groups; the accountability and transparency of decision-makers and more powerful groups; and democratic, inclusive processes that support fair representation and decision making among all groups.