

Rica and the Rolled-out *Periuk*: Lessons from Incorporating GESI Perspective in Livelihood Analysis in Sumatera, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Community and household are often perceived as what Elmhirst (2015) called ‘arenas of assumed common interest’, which think that the impact of development activities should be the same for community as a whole, and for all household members. However, this cannot be the case as the social-economic factors and the access and control over resources differentiate the households within a community as well as the women and men within a household. Based on observations from qualitative researches in two rural communities in Sumatera, this article aims at giving a critical analyses on the impact of development (income generating) activities to the livelihood strategy of different households, using gender empowerment and social inclusion (GESI) perspective. Both communities develop their livelihood strategy in the agriculture frontier landscape. The income generating activities are cultivation of coffee as cash crop for household income and growing seedlings in tree nursery for forest farmers’ group. It was observed that both activities add more work-burden for women than men. Among women, women of better-off households perceived the activity as social responsibility whereas to women of poor households the social responsibility is coupled with real loss of economic opportunity. In the process, women’s productive activities is put secondary to those of households and community, although their productive activities bring a small but continual income that sustain poor households’ subsistence as well as strengthening resiliency. Incorporating GESI perspective in livelihood analysis, therefore, is crucial not only to reveal the intra- and inter-household dynamics, but also to highlight the important contributions of women in household economy and in the overall livelihood strategy. In doing so, this GESI perspective corrects the biased assumption in development program about the community’s common interest.

Keywords: GESI perspective, household economy, intra-household dynamics, livelihood analysis

Introduction

The tendency to view community and household as a single entity with common interest is pervasive. It materialized in development programmes that assumes its impact will be the same to all community members, and at the household level, the same to all family members. In short, it thinks that what is good for the community (or household), must be good for all community- (or household-) members.

From its start, researches in women studies (Boserup 1970 ; Pudjiwati Sajogyo 1983 ; Eviota 1992, to name just a few) and in gender and livelihood (Indriatmoko et al 2007;) have revealed that such assumption is inaccurate. Studies on the income-generating strategy and livelihood system in a community often resulted general observation because they lack of information on the “dimension of difference”, that is, the cultural and socio-economic aspects such as class or economic strata, gender and gender relations, or ethnicity and migrational history of the said community¹.

An example is the development of a social enterprise at a community in West Papua province (Samdhana Institute 2018). The project intended to introduce the processing of coconut into *Virgin Coconut Oil (VCO)*. The community previously sold coconut are as dried-copra. The processing is expected to generate additional income for the household. However, as each household own different amount and age of coconut trees² the income may not be received equally among households. The processing itself uses medium-to-high level of technology and machine is run by men; women are excluded. Lastly, it can only be marketed to a few consumers in big cities, hence a market-dependence. On the other hand, the women of community suggested to process coconut into cooking oil, which not only uses simpler technology, can be done by both men and, mostly, women, and is easier to trade at local market³. The choice of activity and product that the project facilitator/assistance made, therefore, would define which community group receive the most benefits.

The above example indicates the existence of inter-household differences at the community level because of different access and control over resources among households. At the same time, there exists an intra-household dynamics as there are division of labour among household members and differing resource rights of men and women. This dynamic shaped the household strategy.

Based on two experiences at the community level, this paper’s objective is to give a critical analyses on the impact of development (income generating) activities to the livelihood strategy of different households, using gender empowerment and social inclusion (GESI) perspective.

Concepts and Methodology

The conceptual tools of this paper are the livelihood frameworks (Scoones 1998; Bernstein 2009 ; Scoones 2015) and the feminist political ecology (Elmhirst 2015). Ian Scoones (2015:1) gave a simple definition of livelihoods as, “... what people do to make a living in diverse social contexts and circumstances”. Yet it turns out to be not simple at all, as is seen in his 1998

¹ An observation of the same community at same time but different focus, reveals that migrational process of a household affect how a ‘pendatang’ household obtain access rights to various livelihood resources, especially access to land (Sunito and Abdulkadir-sunito, 2019).

² This interpretation is based on report of facilitation activities (The Samdhana Institute, 2018).

³ The development of additional activities was based on personal communications with some Samdhana staffs, mainly AVA, DNI, CNA, and NCA, in several occasion of discussion throughout 2018-2019.

livelihood frameworks (Scoones 2015:36). Further, Bernstein's four core questions⁴ can be linked directly to Scoones' livelihood frameworks.

An attempt to combine the two are made in the livelihood framework with GESI perspective (Abdulkadir-sunito et al 2019). GESI is a perspective to understand the activities and involvement of women and other marginal groups of a community. It is based on the theory of Feminist Political Ecology that positioned gender as "a critical variable in shaping the access and control over resources, and interacts with class, caste, race, culture, and ethnicity to form processes of ecological change, the struggle of men and women to support an ecologically viable livelihood ..." (Rocheleau et al 1996; Elmhirst 2015).

A brief research of exploratory nature was done in June and November 2019 in two rural communities in Sumatera. These were at Tebat Pulau village in Bengkulu province and at DusunEnam hamlet of Lubuk Bintialo village in South Sumatera province. In both place the research focused on gender issues and the livelihood strategy and change.

In both cases, data was mainly gathered from field observation, informal interviews, and – in the case of Lubuk Bintialo, also from one *Focus Group Discussion (FGD)* with Farmer Group members. Secondary information were obtained from the project report of Kelola Sendang (ZSL, no year) and working-paper (AKAR 2018). As per field visit, in Lubuk Bintialo the visit is limited to DusunEnam where the forest-tree nursery project is located whereas in Tebat Pulau a wider area was covered.

Living Space and Livelihood: a Comparison of Two Communities

Tebat Pulau is four hour drives from the capital of Bengkulu province, whilst Lubuk Bintialo is seven hours drive from the capital of South Sumatera province. Both communities develop their livelihood strategy in an agriculture frontier landscape. The "agriculture frontier" is a term used to define the nature of "...pervasive land use and land cover change, usually from forest to agriculture" (Hirsch 2009; Lambin et al 2001; Schiesari et al 2013). The change of forest to agriculture is in response to economic opportunity from global commodities – coffee in the case of Tebat Pulau, and rubber and oilpalm in the case of Lubuk Bintialo.

In Lubuk Bintialo, the settlement area of DusunEnam hamlet are part of protected forest. Although the first settlers came for timber in 2002 most inhabitants only settled in 2015. Most of its inhabitants work outside the hamlet as wage-workers in traditional (illegal) petroleum mining, or at the surrounding plantations of oilpalm and rubber, or as daily-wage workers at a nearby petroleum company (PT CP). Facilities such as village market, primary health clinics and school are all located at DusunSatu, about 30 minutes away using motorcycle or hitchhiked on a coal-trucks.

⁴ They are (1) who owns what (or who has access to what)?, (2) who does what?, (3) who gets what?, and (4) what do they do with it?

The Farmers Group (FG) at DusunEnam hamlet was formed in 2018 following the regulation (Surat Keputusan) on Social Forestry. It was given access to 513 hectares forest, of which 490 ha is in protected area. With this formality, one FG members proudly said, “our status change from encroacher into manager (of forest)”. Each FG members at DusunEnam cultivate different size of plots with different agriculture system, depends on capital capability and socio-economic background. This range from monoculture paddy and small scale horticulture among poor households to medium scale multicropping for households with larger capital (Sunito and Abdulkadir-sunito 2019).

In 2020, the conservation project Kelola Sendang of ZSL initiated seed-nursery as an income-generating activity for the Farmer Group.

Tebat Pulau is located at a highland plateau in an elevation of 1000 m asl. Ricefields exist on flat land area, settlement along the main road, and at the center of village one can find a cluster of small shops and a weekly village market. The small shops are where coffee-farmers sold its harvest to *tauke*, the shop-owner, as well as bought farming needs such as chemical fertilizer and pesticides. At the hilly area of Tebat Pulau, villagers planted trees for its timber (ie. Albizzia), as well as coffee. Most coffee plots are inside the forest.

In 2016 the community of Tebat Pulau was granted legal access to forest. Coffee was already planted inside this forest, but cultivation and harvest was considered illegal by the protected-area status. This culminates years of struggle to regain access to the plots. Therefore, when legal access were given collectively, plots are owned by individual household. And the plot-size are different, based on capital and other resources owned by household

As global commodity become more dominant source of income, so is in living space.

Livelihood Strategy within Project-related Activities

How it works. In Tebat Pulau, with guarantee of access and feeling safe, families spend more time tending their coffee plots. As forest coffee plots are of some distance away from home, family may spend days at their plots. This is especially true during the three months of harvest period. As a result, family members have less time to work and cultivate their home-garden and ricefields. Ricefields may be left uncultivated, or rented by other farmers.

In Lubuk Bintialo planting and tending seedlings in nursery was done by the wives of FG members. The women’s participation is seen as representing their household in group’s income activity. Such work then became a social obligation taken up by the wives, as most activities (i.e., plant seedlings in polybags, watering, weeding) are considered ‘light works’ of farming. Men initially did the ‘heavy work’ which is carrying the soil and mixed it with compost.

Impact to target (household). In Tebat Pulau increase production of coffee means that there is an increase of income for the households. However, such income is vulnerable to external influences, such as price of coffee (as set by local traders as well by price of coffee in other areas of coffee producers), the *tauke* or traders, price of food and goods that can be bought by

the income, and other necessities such as for education and health. Farmers also get their coffee income from the three-month harvest cycle. The remaining nine months they are dependent to the coffee income.

In Lubuk Bintialo, as seedlings is still small and have not sold for reforestation programme, no income is received by the FG. However, it was observed that there are (male) FG members who received monthly stipend to look after the nursery.

(Specific) impact to women. In both area, additional work burden from the coffee cultivation and nursery project is shouldered more by women than men. In Tebat Pulau this additional work burden means that women have less time to look after the homegarden. With less rice produced because ricefield is rented to other farmers, as well as the need for cash to pay for vegetables, spice and herbs, household spend more money for food consumption. In Lubuk Bintialo, women who do wage-work, especially women of poor households loose opportunity of income due to 'social obligation' in working at the nursery. Women of rich household see the obligation as optional. "There should be a calculation of economic value for such work," says one woman of poor-household. "(Otherwise I cannot sold my vegetable at market for two days) *periuk saya bisa ngguling*⁵".

What women do to rectify the situation. In Tebat Pulau some women initiated cultivation of 'rica' (=chili pepper, *Capsicum anuum*) and vegetables at coffee-garden. Vegetables are for own consumption; rica are sold at local market. This means there is an additional income from 'rica' which small but can be obtained all-year-round. In Lubuk Bintialo, it was suggested to FG that women, while doing their 'social obligation' at the nursery are allowed to plant vegetables, or spices and fruits in and around the nursery. Their harvest can be for own-household's consumption (less cash for food). Additional income when vegetables (and fruits) are sold at the market.

Another advantage for this 'social obligation' is to provide room for women to meet, so that they can exchange ideas and information while working together. By providing common area, the hope is no narrow gap between wives of Gapoktan members.

Critical Analysis and Conclusion

Development projects that turns blind-eye to different interest at among members of household and community may brought additional work-burden. In many cases, these additional burden is mainly shouldered by women.

Different meaning of 'work' as social responsibility: women of better-off households perceived the development project's activity as social obligation or responsibility whereas women of poor households the social responsibility is coupled with real loss of economic opportunity.

⁵ Periuk is an earthenware pots used for cooking. "Periuk saya bisa ngguling" or my pots is rolled-out indicated that nothing can be cooked because there is no income for the day.

At the same time, Women's productive activities is put secondary to those of households and community, although the income from it sustain the low-income households' subsistence as well as decreasing vulnerability / increasing resiliency

The significance of crops is translated into significance of work as well as development intervention. The significant crops (i.e. coffee, rubber, oilpalm; those that directly bring cash income) become men's crop, whereas the subsistence crops (i.e., rice, *rica*, vegetables) becomes women's crop. As coffee is considered more valuable to improve the economy of community and household than subsistence crops, development intervention (=programmes) focus on coffee. This at the expense of subsistence crops/commodities (Savitri 2007) which is sidelined, although it may gives continuous income to household, and/or decrease households' expenses for food consumption. The commodity-biased lens of development agents choose which crops to develop⁶.

What women of Tebat Pulau and Lubuk Bintialo did, or plan to do, to rectify the situation is in actuality an attempt to diversify source of income. By that, sustainability of livelihood strategy is increased or improved.

In conclusion, it can be said that incorporating GESI perspective in livelihood analysis is crucial for its ability to reveal the dynamic among household members, or the household economy, as well as the intra-household dynamics at community level. The incorporation of GESI perspective can also highlight the important contributions of women in household economy and in the overall livelihood strategy. This contribution is often put secondary, considered less important, or even considered as a 'social obligation', as the two cases shown.

At the same time, incorporating GESI perspective in livelihood analysis corrects the biased assumption in development programmes about the community's common, and singularity of, interests. For the implementor of programme, be it the state agencies, company, or CSO, this is an important aspect to put in consideration when a project or activity is expected to be comprehensive and sustainable.

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⁶ Further, it was also ignored in the intervention of activities/project from outside, be it government agencies, private organizations, as well as the NGOs.

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