WOMEN, FQOD, HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT;
A CASE STUDY OF CIPARI VILLAGE IN WEST JAVA, INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

AIDA VITAYALA SJAFRI HUBEIS (PPN 80 563), "Women, Food, Health and Development", A Case Study of Cipari Village in West Java, Indonesia. (Under the supervision of PROFESSOR DOCTOR R. MARGONO SLAMET (IPB), PROFESSOR DOCTOR T. SCARLETT EPSTEIN (University of Sussex, England), PROFESSOR DOCTOR AFFENI ANWAR (IPB), PROFESSOR DOCTOR SJARIFUDDIN BAHARSYAH (IPB) and DOCTOR MELY G. TAN (LIPI-Jakarta).

This thesis focusses on women's roles, food, health and development. Therefore, it relates mainly to women's roles in the domestic domain. It is important to study in detail their concrete roles in this area, i.e. whether or not they have any spare labour capacity. If they are found to be underemployed then the demand for women to participate in other than domestic work would have more force. If on the other hand they prove to be fully occupied the reasons for this have to be discovered. To discover this it is necessary to know women's own perception of their traditional roles and their effort to diversify them as well as the handicaps they are facing in this context. Such an enquiry is not limited to ideological viewpoints but includes socio-economic and cultural factors as well. I thus try to explore the reasons for the perpetuation of traditional roles; what women actually do in their domestic work rather than what they should or should not do. To find answers to these questions I suggest that case studies using anthropological style participant observation
with a holistic approach are more helpful to gain in-depth insight rather than rely only on survey methods and questionnaires. This in turn made me concentrate my study on one community only, namely Cipari.

Cipari lies in the hilly terrain of West Java and is generally regarded as one of the most traditional societies of the sub district in which it is situated; it has a total population of 1,653 residing in 350 households. It is a devout Islamic tradition-bound society, where religious leaders exert power not only in religious concerns but also secular matters by means of land ownership. This is reflected in strong "Patron-Client" relationships. Self-sufficiency in paddy is regarded as desirable and as a prestige phenomenon by most villagers. They cultivate irrigated land (sawah) on which they grow two crops of rice per year as well as dry land (tanah darat) on which they cultivate a variety of valuable crops which constitutes an important additional income for villagers. As much as two thirds of the village lands are now owned by outsiders. Many land owners sold their land to rich outsiders just to raise cash for a pilgrimage to Mecca. When they return and find it difficult to make both ends meet they frequently become sharecroppers on the land they previously owned. To some extent, this phenomenon is a result of villagers' ways of life to re-interpret the Quran and then formulate their own 'Folk-religion'. Altogether this has brought about a radical impoverishment in Cipari; the average area of rice
land presently available per household is only 0.2 ha which is less than half the average rice farm size for the whole of Java. Village households can be categorised for analytical purposes into three strata according to their socio-economic standing: 8, 27, 65 percent of the households rank as the richest, middle and poorest respectively. Because of the emphasis on religious training in Cipari there is an unusually high literacy rate even among women; most attend the madrasah, religious school. Women attend usually for fewer years than men and less of them are literate. Thus, Cipari villagers' attitude towards education seems symbolic of their religiosity, which is also reflected in a high degree of cultural continuity and several fatalistic beliefs, though some changes are obviously occurring but very slowly.

To be "a wife", followed by being "a mother" soon after marriage is still the main ambition of most Cipari women, which seems to coincide with what most women want throughout the world. This is likely to be influenced not only by biological needs but also by cultural pressures and religiosity which all reinforce each other. In turn this has a negative impact on the self image of women in preparing themselves to become a wife and/or mother.

The stereotype of a gender specific division of labour still exists among adults as well as children in Cipari. This re-affirms the long established division of labour between men and women; men work less in the home than do women. However, besides being responsible for running the
home, most Cipari women work also productively and contribute considerably to their family's livelihood; the poorer are forced and pushed into seeking an income while the better-off women are pulled into doing so. Yet women's domestic work is still regarded as their prior responsibility and there is hardly any sharing of work; even their directly productive work is still relegated to secondary importance just because most of it is "unpaid family labour". These two roles of housewife and worker often put conflicting demands on women's time and efforts, a problem with which women are struggling bravely.

Economic differentiation between the richest and poorest Cipari households manifests itself not only in terms of amounts of income and expenditure but also in the variety and quality of food consumed which is reflected in different figures of calorie intake. Though income is obviously one of the most important determinants of nutritional levels, seasonal constraints and socio-cultural variables are also significant: social rather than purely economic relationships ensure the survival of the poorest in particular. There is no one single solution for calorie-protein shortages occurring among individuals of the different household strata.

Wives have so far been largely considered as "guardians" of the intra-household food distribution and thus tend to be the one target selected by programmes that aim to improve family health. But this rests on a fallacious
assumption; elder females (e.g. mother and/or mother-in-law), 'mother substitutes' or even sometimes husbands indirectly affect intra-household food distribution. Nutritional programmes therefore should focus not only on wives but also other appropriate family members.

Dietary patterns are related to household composition, timing of meals as well as preferential food distribution which determines "who eats with who and when". In turn this is reflected in prevailing "food inequalities" based on favouring certain family members as well as differentiation by socio-economic setting across generations, sex and age groups; all these re-affirm the differential status of individuals within a family and the rank priority of access to food leading to more respect to the household's present and future "bread winners". Whatever the preferential arrangements it is the woman who "eats least and last" just because they lack selfishness and feel proud to be regarded as spearheads of their traditional culture.

The nutritional status of women is thus worse than men's, not only because of prevailing inequalities of intra family food distribution but also due to the observance of many food taboos. Food taboos affect women's nutrition at least "five times" in their lives: starting from when they are little girls to when they are adults before and after marriage, as pregnant and lactating mothers. At the most crucial stages they are deprived of some of the nutritious foods which they badly need. This in turn affects the
health of their children among whom there is a considerably high rate of infant mortality and malnourishment. Their concern for their children and fear of their death has made mothers prepared to adopt nutritional innovations for their children. Even so they still prefer to choose foods which are believed to involve less risks to their infants or to themselves so as not to worry about breaking too much of the traditional food taboos. Food taboos operating in Cipari are not only important aspects of vulnerable groups dietary patterns, but also means of status differences between the various socio-economic strata. This is reflected in the "obligatory foods" and "behavioural restrictions" that aim to compensate women for the loss of some nutritious foods that they cannot eat during certain periods of their lives. These practices are influenced not only by socio-economic setting but also by ritual beliefs, ecological adaptation, cultural and individual abilities to escape from the "food taboos trap" which often make up the sanctions for the status quo of food taboos. Thus, food taboos and behavioural restrictions for pregnant women function not only as a gestation period but also as harmful periods to their dietary patterns. Here again women are being trapped into conflicting roles; on the one hand they are expected to act as preservers of customary values and beliefs which manifests itself in the food taboos they have to observe, while on the other hand as mothers of children with high infant mortality they have become the spearheads
of social change by adopting new food patterns to ensure a better survival rate for their future generations. Thus in Cipari food patterns strategically affect not only women's roles in particular but development in general.

Summary implications

This study illustrates the complex interdependence between women's roles, food, health and development associated with the perpetuation of the traditional division of labour between men and women, patron-client links, fatalistic beliefs, traditional food norms as well as socio-economic constraints. Because of this complexity, changes in this tradition bound society are likely to take place only slowly. Appropriate approaches, methods and channels of communication in extension efforts are essential to raise the willingness of villagers to adopt changes. This is exemplified by the introduction of the Kitchen Garden Project in an attempt to help improve the family nutritional levels. It had lasting impact not only in Cipari as the affected population but has also been diffused and adopted by other neighbouring villages. Though it is too early to judge the overall impact of this kind of extension programme which was based on action research, it seems to indicate that changes are possible even within the most traditional society by using and developing a more rooted extension arrangements. Since this kind of action research is a novel venture for academic researchers it needs more refinement from all those concerned with rural development in general and the role of women in it in particular.
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