



Oil Palm Expansion: Aspects and Gender Roles in Rural Oil Palm Farm Households

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ABSTRACT: This paper comprehends that commercialization in Indonesia, especially in the plantation sector, has increased every year. In this paper, the focus of this research is on oil palm plantations which are expected to increase every year. One of the actors playing a role in this expansion is farmer households. The purpose of this paper is to analyze and describe gender aspects and roles in oil palm farmer households. This research used qualitative and quantitative approaches. There were 20 informants in the study for qualitative data and 80 respondents for quantitative data. The types of data used in this research were secondary data and primary data. Primary data were obtained through observation, in-depth interviews, and questionnaires, while secondary data were obtained from literature studies and documents related to this paper. The results of this study reveal that this expansion changes and influences gender aspects in oil palm farmer households, such as increasing women's working time due to entering productive sectors, and the emergence of new sources of economic income for women.

KEYWORDS: Expansion, Gender, Oil Palm.

1. INTRODUCTION

Commercialization in the agricultural sector leads to expansion of commercial crops. One of the commercial plants that are speeding up and experiencing an increase in land demand each year is oil palm. It is estimated that oil palm plantations in 2017 in Indonesia have around 12.30 million hectares (Directorate General of Plantation, 2017). Furthermore, it can be seen from the area of oil palm based on domination in 2017 that it is estimated that 49,81% is controlled by large private companies (PBS), followed by smallholders 45,5% and State Enterprises (PBN) 4,6% (Directorate General of Plantation, 2018). Based on these data, it can be seen that there has been an increase in the replenishment in land area for oil palm plants, where this expanded is greater by PBS and smallholders. Therefore, smallholder are one of the actors that play a role in oil palm expansion that occurs in the countryside.

On the other hand, it cannot be denied that the expansion of oil palm land conducted by smallholder contributes to increasing economic income and welfare. According to Barbier (2004), the expansion of long-term agricultural land may also correlate with a pattern of booms in economic development, through increased agricultural production (Christensen, 1964). Furthermore, Dharmawan et al. (2016) stated that the expansion of oil palm cannot be separated and always has an impact on changes in the economy of smallholder and the structure of livelihoods and gender relations.

In terms of gender, changes in the mode of production are conducted by farmer households, where food agricultural land is transformed into oil palm plantations, bringing new opportunities for women. The opportunities are various from the agricultural sectors to the employment sectors which have an impact on the changes in the lives of rural women. The existence of labor wages for rural women allows households to adopt a better livelihood strategy by entering into industrialization (Savath et.al, 2014).

As a result, the oil palm expansion opens opportunities for women in rural areas to work in the non-farm sectors, where to this point women are acknowledged with domestic works, and are involved in agricultural sectors only as their husband's assistant in helping with the works. Because all this time women are not identical as the main breadwinner to fulfill family's needs. However, the presence of oil palm has caused a shift in the role of women. The oil palm expansion is expected to escalate the role of women as breadwinners even though it is not their main role, where the income is used to meet children's educational needs, to fulfill household needs, as well as for daily living expenses. The assumption is that the oil palm expansion has affected women entering the public arena and the cash economy which has a role in achieving household economies. This undoubtedly has an impact on changing gender aspects and roles in the oil palm farmer households in the rural areas. Accordingly, the aim of this paper is to analyze and describe gender aspects and roles in the rural oil palm farmer households.



Research Method

This research was conducted in one of the plantation villages in West Sumatra Province because the local population in this village is affected by agricultural modernization and market capitalism. The main sources of income for the local people are rubber and oil palm plantations. However, for the oil palm commodity, it is estimated that since 2010, the farmer households have begun to expand and leave rubber plants as their main source of income. For approximately seven years, there has been expansion of oil palm lands performed by the farmer households. The expansion is very significant, specifically 193% for oil palm and 21% for rubber plants ((in accordance with BPS data for South Solok Regency in 2011 and 2017).

This research approach used in this research is a combination method of qualitative and quantitative or mixing both approaches in one study. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative and quantitative data can be combined into one large database that is used side by side to strengthen each other. This research used qualitative and quantitative methods with data collection techniques: (1) documents or writings that aim to find the information needed (Creswell, 2013); such as documents obtained at the village office, Capil office, Bappeda, district and BPS, DPRD and other related agencies (2) observation that pays attention to the phenomena in the field through the five senses of the researcher and records for scientific purposes were based on research objectives and research questions such as witnessing the physical environment, participants, activities, interactions, conversations (Creswell, 2015); and (3) in-depth interviews, namely an unstructured interview between the interviewer and the informant that was conducted repeatedly with different questions, and classified previously obtained information. In-depth interviews were conducted with oil palm smallholder, oil palm farmers 'wives, and triangulation of data to oil palm farmers' children. For quantitative data, researchers used a survey method with 80 respondents.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The introduction of oil palm opens employment opportunities in all societies with their imitation of productive livelihoods and reproduction including gender (Elmhirst, et al., 2015). Gender is conceptualized as a rule, habit and practices of biological differences that are translated into social differences between men and women (Biggs at al., 2014). In terms of women, they play a leading role in sustainable palm oil production activities such as fruit steaming (86.7%) and oil drying (73.3%) (I. A. Enwelu, et al., 2016). In addition, the development of oil palm plantations leads women to enter the public land. Based on field data, from 100% of respondents, 42.5% of women work as plantation workers, and 32.5% work in other fields such as office employees, sewing, rubber tapping, and trading. This means that 75% of women have jobs outside of their roles as housewives.

According to C.K. Omari (1988), women have a prominent contribution in the household economy through non-agricultural activities. Based on research results, shows that on land tenure women with narrow land tenure as a whole are involved in plantations, namely as laborers in plantation companies, while women with middle land tenure are 41.6% involved in oil palm plantations. For women with wide land tenure, 35.7% of them are involved in plantations, namely as plantation employees. The rest of them open businesses and work in other fields such as trading and sewing. This means that the less land controlled by smallholder, the greater the chance of women to work in plantation companies to support household income it is. This is in contrast to women who own wide land tenure, which they have the opportunity to open various business fields supported by agricultural income. On the other hand, it can be seen that the wider the land, the less involvement of women as plantation laborers it is. Thus, the entry of women into the public sector on oil palm and non-farm plantations will certainly have an impact on increasing women's working hours outside and within the domestic sector (see Figure 1).

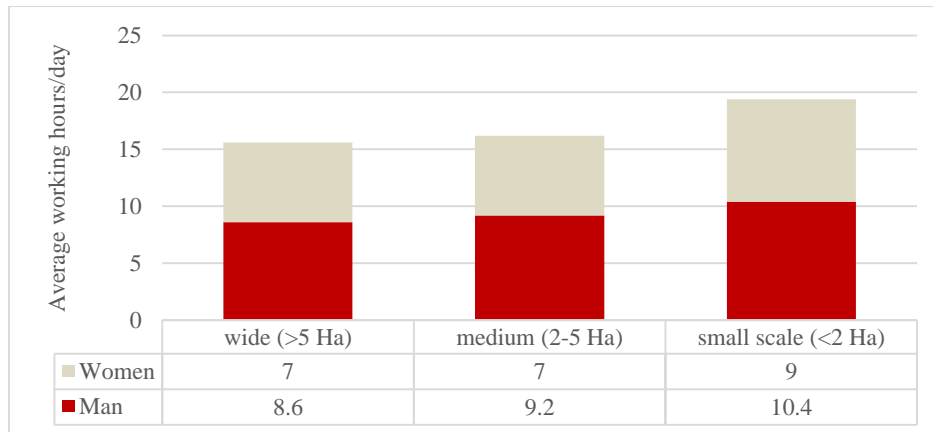


Figure 1. Average comparison of working hours for men and women in the public/productive sector in local village 2018
 Source: Primary Data 2018

Based on Figure 1 above, it can be seen a comparison of the working time of men and women in the public sector. From the data, it can be seen that the average working time of men is higher than women in the public sector; however, the difference is an average of 1.7 hours per day. Furthermore, seen from land tenure, women with small scale land tenure have a higher working time in the public sector compared to women with medium and wide land tenure as well as men. However, outside the public sector, women must play their role as housewives whose work is taking care of children and husband, washing, cooking, as well as shopping in the market to meet family consumption needs (see Figure 2).

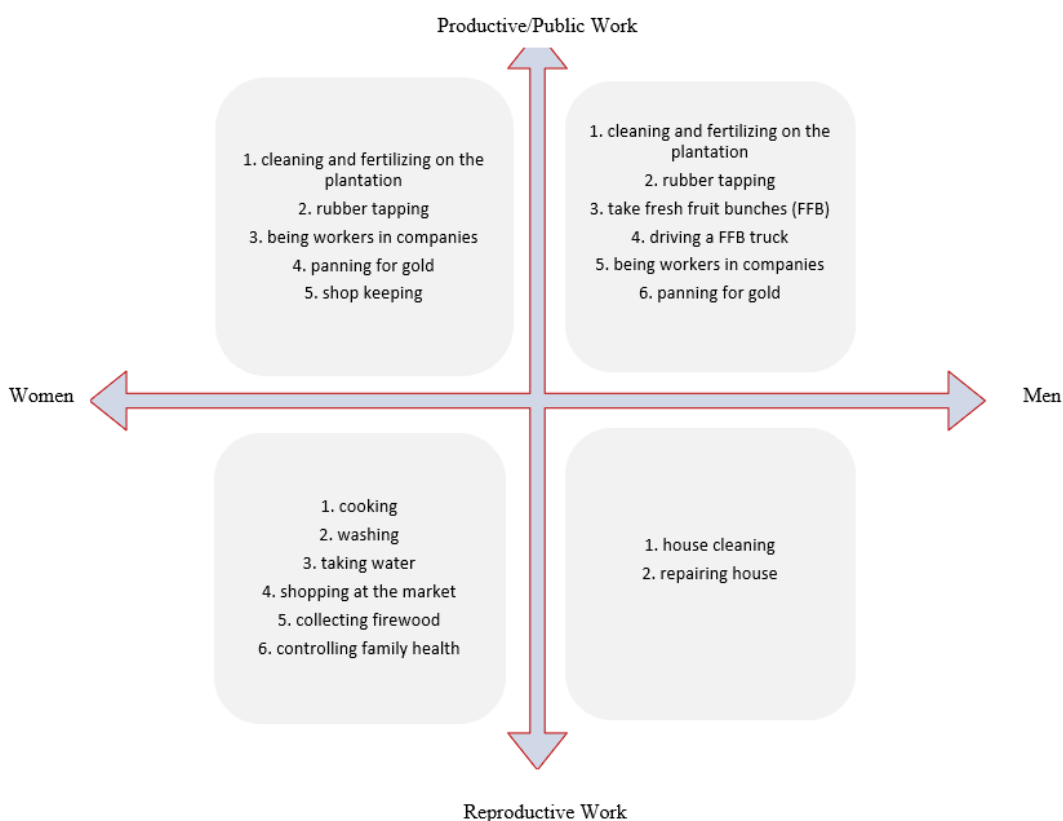


Figure 2. Roles of Men and Women in the Productive/Public and Reproductive Sectors



Based on Figures 1 and 2, it can be comprehended how the working time and role of women and men in the productive/public and reproductive sectors. It can be perceived that the presence of oil palm makes the increase in women's working time compared to the arrival of oil palm and the increasing role of women in the reproductive/public sector, although on the economic side the increase in households increases as expressed by SR (38 years).

Box 2. Women's Activities and Working Time (Public/Productive and Domestic Sectors)

Mrs. Sr (38 years old) is a housewife, and works in an oil palm plantation company. Mrs. Sr has two children whose first child is still in high school, and the second is in elementary school. Before planting oil palm commodities, Mrs. Sr was only a housewife, whose average working time was only at home to take care of children and husband and do work that should be done by housewives such as cooking, washing, and providing the daily needs of children and husband. However, when she enters the oil palm plantation, and her husband move to oil palm, it changes her working time and employment. At the moment, Mrs. Sr is working on an oil palm plantation. On her holiday, she also uses her time to help her husband in cleaning and fertilizing on her own oil palm plantation.

If it is seen from her working time in the public sector, she works on average in one week ± eight hours per day, while her husband works ± nine hours per day. However, her job is not only on oil palm plantations. When she arrives at the house, she will do household chores such as cooking, washing, ironing, or cleaning the house. Her average working time in the domestic sector is ± four hours per day. As expressed by Mrs. Sr, if at night, she does not cook, at around four or five in the morning, she has already woken up because she has to cook for her husband and children. She also has to take care of the children and husband's equipment since around 06.00 WIB, Mrs. Sr has to go to work. In the afternoon, Mrs. Sr will use her time to wash and clean the house and do other activities related to her role as a housewife. This is always conducted every day by Mrs. Sr. Furthermore, seen from the source of income, the average salary earned by Mrs. Sr every month from the company is Rp1.480.000. The money earned from her job is used to meet the school needs of her children or to meet daily needs. Whereas her husband's income is also used to meet children's education needs and the cost of daily living. The rest is only used for land management or home construction.

Source: Results of Interview with Mrs. Sr.

In addition, it can be realized from the high number of women entering the public arena, indirectly supporting the family economy. Women's income propositions usually invest higher in family and society than men (OECD, 2012). But in decision making within the household, women do not fully have a stake in the asset and economic sectors. However, in the terms of education and health, women are more dominant than men. This can be portrayed in Figure 3 below.

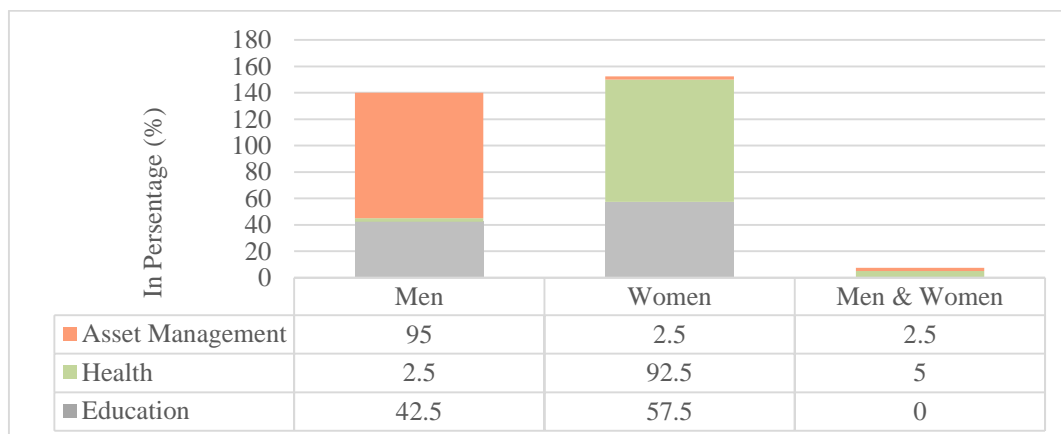


Figure 3. The comparison of decision making in the terms of education, health and asset management in local village
 Source: Primary Data 2018



Based on the figure above, decision making in the health sector is dominated by women is 92,5%. The data also shows that in the education sector, men and women are still balanced. According to UNDP (2012), the dominance of women cannot be separated from the role of women in the household in terms of production, management of agricultural food, marketing, and responsibility for nutrition at home. Meanwhile, in decision making in the education sector, women are comparable with men. Therefore, according to Julia & Ben White (2011), women have no control over oil palm expansion, so that they are only as recipients of the impact of the expansion because the patriarchal system prohibits women's involvement in official decision-making.

Furthermore, in terms of access and control of land tenure and ownership of assets in the research location, respondents stated ownership of assets, especially land and houses on behalf of women. This is evidenced by ownership in the form of legal land certificates and customary recognition. This can not be separated from the culture in the location of research with the matrilineal system. Women are leaders in the domestic sector of their people, controllers and guarantor of the maintenance of the inheritance of of their people (M.S Amir, 2011). However, the reality in managing these assets is still dominated by men. Women only act de facto as rulers, meanwhile men's access is stronger than women with that power. This means that oil palm expansion does not change or affect access and control of land tenure in the research area. Thus, women's contribution to the family economy does not affect their access and control over resources.

According to Dicka et al. (2017), land can be owned under a legal or customary tenure system, then usage rights involve the ability or permission to use assets including sales. Women's access to resources and in decision making tends to be through mediation with men. In addition, male dominance in bargaining power can also be seen from the decision making in the sale of assets and the purchase of assets which must be approved by the husband, *ninik mamak*, and *datuk* from his people. Without their agreement, the assets, whether in the form of land, cannot be traded. Whereas, at the household level, the husband is the decision maker in asset management (see Table 1).

The dominant role of men in making asset management decisions in farm households makes women's position weak in controlling land resources. According to the FAO (2018), women face more limited access to agricultural resources than men, where women's access to the means of production in particular control of land is still largely limited by patriarchal power relations operating at the community and household level (Dietz et al., 2015). Whereas, land is the most valuable asset in the most rural households and the basis for agricultural production (Dicka et al., 2017). Furthermore, from the typology of expansion based on actors, the involvement of women in plantations cannot be denied in terms of production, reproduction, access, and decision making. Women have an important role to play in those aspects, between expansion and interrelation or relationships (see Table 1).

Table 1. The Correlation between the Expansion Typology to the Engagement of Women in Plantation

Ac Expansion Typology based on Actors	Women's Involvement in Plantations (seen from several aspects)			
	The role of women in production	The role of women in reproductive work	Poperty control of oil palm plantation land	Decision making in expansion of plantation land
Land expansion conducted by landlords and local officials	-	Dominant women	Dominant men	Dominant men
Expansion conducted by large plantation companies through plasma land expansion in the PIR	Involved as labors	-	Women and Men	
Expansion conducted by farmers in general	-	Dominant women	Dominant men	Dominant men

Source: Primary Data 2018

Based on the table above, the involvement of women in production and access to land is very high in the typology of expansion conducted by farmers through cooperation with companies (plasma) compared to other expansion typologies. However, it is reproductively found in the typology of local elites and local farmers. Consequently, the assumption that oil palm expansion is conducted by men will generally have an impact on women because after all, this expansion will involve women in certain sectors.



3. CONCLUSION

The results of the study indicate that first, there is a gender transformation in rural farm households. Women are increasingly active in the productive/public sector compared to the past. Furthermore, the expansion of oil palm conducted by smallholder has a very significant structural change related to the structure of livelihoods and the proportion of women working outside the household. This means there is a change in the status of women who have only been helping men all this time; however, now they become substantial breadwinners.

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