



The Balance of Power in Household Decision-Making: Encouraging News on Gender in Southern Sulawesi

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Summary. — Analyses of intra-household decision-making in Sulawesi are linked to gender issues shown to affect involvement in landscape management. These include agriculture, food, money, life chances, and attitudes toward domestic violence. The picture portrayed is encouraging, showing the social sophistication of a group often marginalized: This group shows considerable female involvement in decision-making and strongly democratic elements. We identify three issues that need greater attention—for equitable landscape management to result: women’s spheres of decision-making must be ascertained and taken into account, men’s involvement in care needs to expand, and women’s agency requires enhancement and external support.

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Women continue to be disadvantaged by...exclusion from decision-making at household, community and national levels.

[Catacutan, McGaw, and Llanza (2014)]

1. INTRODUCTION

Why are women still missing from landscape governance processes? Who is making the micro-level decisions that affect people’s daily lives, ultimately feeding into meso-scale decisions? These were key questions that prompted our study.

These questions emerged as key in the AgFor project,¹ designed to enhance collaborative management of landscapes in Sulawesi. AgFor researchers have found, not unusually, that involving women and (to some extent) men in landscape governance² has proven difficult. Evidence from Sulawesi and other parts of Indonesia suggests women’s comparatively active decision-making roles. Why then were these women—like women elsewhere—so invisible at larger scales and in more formal settings?

Some of the patterns we observed suggested impediments to women’s involvement, varying by site, but linked to norms and obligations at home:

- Women’s lesser educational levels and knowledge of national languages, resulting in less self-confidence and discomfort speaking up among men.
- Lack of childcare to travel or attend meetings.
- Cultural domestic prescriptions for women, conflicting with timing of formal meetings.
- Women’s generalized time constraints.
- Local men’s reluctance to expose women to alien gender norms and/or outsiders’ negative stereotypes.
- Taboos/discomfort with women’s travel (and recognized dangers therein).

- Subtle and overt exclusion (more pronounced for women than men) by high prestige visitors.

Although all of these, important to varying degrees globally, can interfere with women’s involvement in formal landscape governance, all are amenable to change (whether endogenous or externally stimulated). Such change can build on men’s cooperation, governmental flexibility and attitude change, changing economic conditions, and/or discussion of ways to overcome these constraints.

We realized that decision-making within the household was a key factor.³ There is a lack of logic in asking these women, typically burdened with both agricultural and domestic responsibilities, to become more involved in agroforestry or governance, without corresponding changes in men’s workload (e.g., contributing to vital household tasks that women currently perform, e.g., Lewis & Giullari, 2006). Just how strong a voice did these women have within their own households

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and in their family fields? And how involved were men in household decisions?

To answer these questions, we first asked a sample of villagers about the decisions they made in the management of fields and crops. But we added to these, decisions from what is typically termed the reproductive (or domestic) sphere—the sphere most closely associated with women.⁴

Groups vary greatly in the degree to which they under-value women, but within the development community *writ large*, women have been the more consistently ignored gender. Once truly invisible, in recent years their value has been measured with economics in mind: by their formal productivity, their wage earning capacity, their contribution to GDP, their educational level (all lower than men's, on average); or they have been identified as passive victims, their capabilities, contributions, and hopes for the future ignored.⁵ Here we build on the view of rural men and women as actors, constrained by a variety of contextual realities, but actors nonetheless, with capabilities, interests, and hopes of their own.

We recognize too that for human beings to subsist and flourish, both productive and reproductive tasks must be accomplished. A number of scholars have argued that the analytic differentiation between production and reproduction itself has been a factor in women's invisibility. Van Esterik and Greiner (1981) and Folbre (2006) provide useful examples of the fuzzy boundaries between these categories. More recently Razavi (2011) edited a special issue of *Development and Change* on the related subject of care.

(a) *A need for re-framing*

Barker (2014), a student of “men and development”, has concluded that,

“...men and boys doing gender justice and achieving richer and fuller (including healthier and less violent) lives – and women and girls achieving their full potential in political, social and work spheres – requires nothing less than a radical redistribution of care work.”

[(p. 85; also called for by Razavi, 2002).]

We too call for a global *re-framing*, such that these ubiquitous and crucial, home-based tasks are recognized and appreciated comparably⁶—requiring a move away from the production–reproduction dichotomy, most likely. This requires looking at lives (and research) holistically. It also requires building on whatever domestic activities men are currently doing. Inviting, even demanding, women's increasing involvement in agricultural production and governance spawns this question: What happens to women's current roles? Van Esterik (1999) called for a “vocabulary of care”; Folbre (2006) for measuring “the care economy”. Lewis and Giullari (2006) note the interdependence among human capabilities and their dependence in turn on the care we have received and are able to provide. They go on to argue that,

“Women's agency is situated in relationships of care, and therefore that concern for others needs to be taken seriously as an expression of autonomy...[T]he key issue is...how to promote conditions that foster responsibility for sharing care between men and women and that enhance women's agency freedom by making men more accountable for their responsibility to care for others...It is only when all persons are conceived from the start as autonomous and interdependent—that is as persons who need, give and receive care...that gender equality in respect of agency freedom can be embraced.” (p. 184).

There is wider agreement on the global stage that people everywhere deserve equal rights to self-determination and self-actualization—which may variously require moving beyond the domestic sphere or becoming more involved in it.

Although mechanisms like legislation can serve as spurs to changing gender norms and behavior (Doss, 2013, provides positive, gender-relevant examples), ultimately these issues will require discussion, evidence, and thought...and eventually a change in values. Culturally appropriate solutions will require women and men to think together about ways forward (see Bujra, 2002, for a discussion of such successful change in Africa; or Welsh, 2011, in Nicaragua).

(b) *Care, agency, bargaining, and ethnography*

Our study provides an example of some needed evidence on gendered decision-making—one piece of the puzzle. Here, we outline some of the works that have influenced our thinking, focusing on care and agency, followed by brief mention of bargaining and ethnographic holism.

(i) *On dualities, hegemonies, and the “vocabulary of care”*

Dualistic distinctions like production–reproduction may not be helpful and indeed may limit our efforts to achieve the gender equity we see as integral to human and landscape health. Our (collective) previous focus on women *or* men—yet another duality—has been misguided; we have imagined instead their shared humanity, equivalence or complementarity, and the relations between them. The unusually gender-equitable traditional systems of ethnic groups like the Tolaki (discussed below) can perhaps provide partial models for those who hope to involve women and men effectively in governance and at broader scales.

Van Esterik (1999), noting the global concern for food security, has argued for more attention to the rights to be fed, to food, and to feed others. Such a concern has both landscape implications *and* leads directly to women's lives, to a coalescing of what we've thought of as production and reproduction.

The field of “men in development” has emphasized the notion of “hegemonic masculinity”—the idea that “real men” [everywhere] must demonstrate their achievement of manhood by being successful breadwinners, powerful, strong, and in control of their families (see collections by Bannon & Correia, 2006; Cornwall, Edström, & Greig, 2011b; Inhorn, Tjornhoj-Thomsen, Goldberg, & Mosegaard, 2009). In many areas, such an ideal is demonstrable.

However, for parts of Southeast Asia, this notion does not fit in its “ideal” form⁷; and it is particularly inappropriate for upland groups like the Tolaki (see Atkinson, 1989; Atkinson & Errington, 1990; Errington, 1989; Li, 1998, on Sulawesi; or Andaya, 2006, for Southeast Asia generally). These groups more closely resemble the gendered egalitarian hegemony discussed in Ortner (1989–90).

Atkinson (1989), for instance, in discussing the Wana, a Central Sulawesi group similar to the Tolaki, says,

“[Wana] Men's and women's procreative and household roles are closely matched in cultural terms; nurturance is cast as a parental, not a uniquely female, act; and both women and men are food producers. Women and men are conceived to be fundamentally the same... Notions of gender are constructed as a continuum rather than as a set of dichotomies...” (p. 282).⁸

The systems of the groups discussed here fit comfortably with such a “vocabulary of care” (cf. Garrity *et al.*, 2002, on the land care movement).

(ii) *On female agency*

Kabeer (1999) stimulated our focus on decision-making; she defines agency as

“...the ability to define one's goals and act upon them. Agency is about more than observable action; it also encompasses the meaning,

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