

The phenomenon of actions and social dynamics of women farm workers in the shallot agricultural system in Enrekang Regency, South Sulawesi

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ABSTRACT

The decrease in the number of male workers in the rural shallot agricultural sector, including in Enrekang Regency, has encouraged the increasing role of women as farm laborers. However, their involvement is often faced with a double problem, namely, low levels of education, unequal access to resources, and the burden of domestic roles that go hand in hand with productive responsibilities. This study aims to analyze the socio-economic dynamics of women farm workers, especially related to work motivation, wage system, dual role adaptation strategies, and social relationships with landowners in the shallot farming system. The research method uses a qualitative approach with a case study design in Banti Village, Enrekang Regency, South Sulawesi. Respondents were selected using purposive sampling techniques, consisting of 15 female farm workers (aged 40–60 years) and five productive landowners. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, participatory observation over two harvest cycles, and document studies, then analyzed using the Miles-Huberman interactive model with source triangulation techniques. The results show that the primary motivation of female farm workers is to meet the economic needs of their families, even though they have a low educational background. The mutually agreed daily wage system is considered fair and capable of creating social stability. In addition, trust-based recruitment patterns, harmonious relationships with landowners, and the provision of non-material benefits strengthen social capital in agricultural communities. Time management strategies and family support, especially from husbands, allow women to remain productive despite taking on dual roles. These findings underscore the importance of gender-responsive and local wisdom-based policies to improve the welfare of women farm workers and the sustainability of small-scale farming systems in rural areas.

Keywords:

Female farm workers, Social capital, Social dynamics, Shallots, Wage system

1. Introduction

Shallot farming in Indonesia plays a strategic role in food security and the local economy, especially in rural areas. In Banti Village, Enrekang Regency, this commodity is not only the main source of income but also involves significant participation of female workers. This phenomenon is interesting to research given the complexity of the dual role that female farm workers play between household responsibilities and the family's economic contribution. This study focuses on the socio-economic dynamics of women agricultural workers in the onion agribusiness system, by exploring work motivation factors, wage mechanisms, and power relations between sectors. Preliminary findings suggest that women's participation in the sector is driven by urgent economic needs, despite the challenges of time management between work and household affairs [1,2].

The importance of this research is because it provides a social, economic, and cultural context that shapes the work dynamics of women farm workers in the onion



cultivation business. Knowing that most female agricultural workers are 40-60 years old, have low education, and work primarily to meet the economic needs of their families. In addition, the mutually agreed daily wage system, as well as the relative satisfaction of the wages received, show how economic aspects and social agreements go hand in hand in local agricultural practices. It clarifies the importance of income stability for women agricultural workers and how the wage system affects their well-being. Harmonious social relations between female farm workers and landowners, which are based on informal communication and family values, enrich the understanding of how working relationships in agriculture are not always formal, but are also influenced by local values such as cooperation and mutual respect. This confirms that social factors play a very important role in creating a conducive work environment. The study also highlights the dual role of women farm workers as workers and housewives, as well as the time management strategies they have undertaken, so that the complexity of workload and the importance of family support, especially husband, in maintaining a balance between domestic work and productivity on farmland are well established [3].

The state of the art of this research can be demonstrated the development of research on women farm workers in Indonesia shows that the role of women in the agricultural sector is getting more attention, both from economic, social, and cultural perspectives. Recent studies highlight that women not only contribute significantly to family economic resilience but are also involved in all stages of agricultural production, from planting to harvest and post-harvest. However, despite their high involvement, women still face challenges in the form of wage inequality, limited access to resources, and low participation in decision-making at the household and community levels. The phenomenon of agricultural feminization in Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, is also influenced by the migration of men to the non-agricultural sector, so that the workload of women in the agricultural sector is increasing, but it has not been balanced with adequate recognition and protection [4,5].

In addition, recent research emphasizes the importance of changing social norms and more gender-responsive policies to increase the empowerment of women farm workers. Gender mainstreaming efforts in the agricultural sector have begun to be implemented, but there is still a gap between policies and practices on the ground. Comparative studies in Southeast Asia show that women are often the primary managers of household finances and decision-makers related to children's education, but still face structural barriers in access to training, technology, and farm credit. Therefore, recent research recommends the need for policy interventions that focus not only on economic aspects, but also on social and cultural transformations to create more inclusive and gender-equitable agricultural ecosystems.

Research gaps identified in this study. First, most of the previous research still focused on macroeconomic aspects or national statistics related to women farm workers, but very few explored in depth the social dynamics, wage mechanisms, and adaptation strategies of women farm workers at the local level, especially in the eastern part of Indonesia such as Banti Village, Enrekang. In addition, previous research has rarely highlighted the integration of local values, family systems, and social capital in agricultural practices, even though these aspects have a significant impact on the welfare and social stability of women farm workers. Second, research on the impact of mechanization and technological change on employment

opportunities and the dual role of women farm workers is also still very limited. Meanwhile, the evaluation of the effectiveness of gender-responsive policies in the agricultural sector, especially in the context of wage systems, faith-based recruitment patterns, and social support from families, has not been comprehensively carried out. Therefore, this study is here to fill this gap by holistically examining socio-economic dynamics, adaptation strategies, and the influence of social and cultural relations on the productivity and welfare of women farm workers at the community level [6,7].

The existence of non-material benefits and a trust-based recruitment system suggests that non-economic aspects, such as rewards and mutual trust, are also an integral part of the agricultural system at the research site. Thus, it is not only limited to economic aspects but also includes the social and cultural dimensions that make up the entire work ecosystem of women farm workers. This study aims to analyze: (1) the structure of material and non-material incentives in the wage system, (2) the adaptation strategy of small agricultural workers. The academic significance of this research lies in its contribution to gender literacy in rural development studies, particularly in the context of commercial agricultural systems integrated with local values. Practically, the results of the research can be the basis for policy recommendations to improve the welfare of women farm workers.

The main purpose of this study is to analyze in depth the socio-economic dynamics of women farm workers in the onion farming system in Banti Village, Enrekang Regency. This study specifically aims to: (1) identify and understand the structure of material and non-material incentives in the wage system of women farm workers, (2) examine the adaptation strategies carried out by women farm workers in facing the dual roles of workers and housewives, and (3) explore how social relations—both between women farm workers and with land owners and with family members— affect productivity, welfare, and social stability in the local agricultural environment.

In addition, this research also aims to contribute to gender literacy in rural development studies, especially in the context of commercial agricultural systems that are integrated with local values. The results of the research are expected to be the basis for more inclusive and gender-responsive policy recommendations, both at the community and government levels, to improve the welfare and recognition of the role of women farm workers in the sustainable agricultural ecosystem in Indonesia [8].

2. Methods

2.1. Research Location and Respondent

This research was carried out in Banti Village, Baraka District, Enrekang Regency, South Sulawesi in February-May 2025. Location is selected by purposive Because it is a shallot production center with a high level of women's involvement in agribusiness activities. The respondents consisted of 15 female farm workers aged 40–60 years with junior high school education and below, and 5 landowners aged 30–43 years with high school to S1 education. Respondent selection using purposive sampling based on the criteria of work experience of at least 5 years and active involvement in the shallot production cycle.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews to explore motivations, wage systems, and adaptation strategies; participatory observation over two harvest cycles; and document studies in the form of field records and production reports. Data

analysis uses the Miles and Huberman interactive model which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. To maintain validity, the study applied data triangulation, which is comparing information from various sources (farm laborers, landowners, and documents) as well as data collection methods so that the research results are more accurate, objective, and accountable and provide a comprehensive picture of the mechanism of wage management and dual roles [9].

The study respondents consisted of two main groups, namely 15 female farm workers aged 40–60 years with junior high school education and below, and 5 productive landowners aged 30–43 years with high school to S1 education. The determination of respondents was carried out by the purposive sampling method, which is the deliberate selection of informants based on certain criteria that can provide information according to research needs. The criteria used include at least 5 years of work experience, active involvement in the shallot production cycle, and willingness to be interviewed and observed during the study. With this approach, the selected respondents were seen as representative to explain the socio-economic phenomenon of women farm workers in the research site. with a case study that explores in depth the phenomenon of women farm workers. The location of the research was deliberately determined in Banti Village based on the high intensity of shallot agribusiness activities and women's participation in the production system. Interviews are focused on work experience, remuneration systems, and time management strategies. Field observations were carried out during 2 harvest cycles to verify work behavior data in respondents.

2.2. Data Collection and Analysis Techniques

To ensure validity, a combination of methods is used: Semi-structured interviews with 15 farm workers and 5 land owners (purposive sampling), Participatory observation during 2 harvest cycles to verify work behavior, Document study (field coordinator notes, production reports) as secondary data, Source triangulation by comparing the perspectives of workers, landowners, and field data [10–12]. Data analysis follows the Miles-Huberman interactive model with stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusions drawn. Source triangulation was carried out by comparing the perspectives of farm workers, landowners, and secondary data from field coordinators¹. The ethical aspects of the research are maintained through the process of informed consent, anonymity of respondent identity data, and validation of the results of interpretation to participants. The researcher also conducts critical reflection on the position to minimize bias in the data analysis.

3. Results and Discussion

This study involved two main groups, namely women farm workers and landowners in the onion farming system in Banti Village. In terms of incentive structure, female farm workers who are generally 40-60 years old with junior high school education and below receives a daily wage of IDR 50,000-IDR 90,000 according to the work agreement, plus non-material incentives in the form of snacks, drinks, and crops such as onions. This form of incentive is seen as fair by workers because it can support household needs while strengthening social relations with landowners. Meanwhile, the adaptation strategy of small farm workers in facing the dual role of workers and housewives is carried out through time management, such as waking up early to complete domestic work, as well as sharing tasks with family members. Support from

their husbands and children proves to be an important factor that allows them to remain productive on the farm while maintaining a balanced household. These findings show that material and non-material incentives function not only as a tool of economic fulfillment, but also as a reinforcement of social capital, while the adaptation strategies of women workers are key to the sustainability of shallot agribusiness at the rural household level, in line with previous research that emphasized the role of women as the backbone of the family economy, particularly in rural areas of Southeast Asia [13].

3.1. Payroll and Job Satisfaction System

The salary earned by female farmer employees is Rp50,000 (half a day), Rp80,000 (full day), increasing the fasting month time to Rp90,000 per day because the salary of female farmer employees increases by Rp10,000 during the fasting month. Farm workers expressed satisfaction with the wages received because they were in accordance with the initial agreement and relatively helped with daily needs. Even so, they still hope that there will be a salary increase in the future. The daily wage system that has been mutually agreed upon between landowners and women farm workers shows flexibility and adaptation to local needs. The average wage received, while considered adequate by farm workers, still leaves hope for future increases. This wage system not only has an impact on economic well-being, but also on social stability, due to mutual agreements that reduce the potential for conflict. A study by affirms the importance of a fair wage system in increasing productivity and job satisfaction in the agricultural sector [14].

3.2. Social Relations of Female Employees and Landowners

The relationship between women farm workers and landowners is harmonious, based on informal communication in the workplace and outside of work. This form of relationship forms a sense of kinship and friendship, which is seen as important by both parties. There is no difference in the treatment or discrimination of landowners against female workers. Harmonious social relations between female agricultural workers and landowners are colored by family values and intense informal communication. There was no discrimination or differential treatment of female workers, and even landowners often provided non-material perks such as snacks and crops. This shows that the agricultural system in Banti Village is not only oriented towards economic profit, but also prioritizes the value of cooperation and mutual respect, as explained by the study of traditional agriculture in Indonesia [15].

3.3. Dual Roles and Time Management Strategies

Most female agricultural employees have dual roles as workers and housewives. They arrange household chores by waking up early (05.00) to prepare food before leaving for the onion garden. Some have trouble completing housing work, especially if they don't have a daughter or a helpful family member. The response from families, especially husbands, has been very supportive, as the additional income from this job helps ease the economic burden on the family. Habibi et al. [16] and Syarif et al. [17] explain that the dual role of female farm workers, namely as workers and housewives, is a challenge, one of which is the time management strategy by waking up early and sharing household tasks with family members, especially husbands, is the key to their success in carrying out these two roles. Family support is essential in maintaining a balance between work on the land and household responsibilities. This

phenomenon is supported by research to develop collective adaptation strategies to overcome multiple workloads. In addition to salaries, farm workers often receive snacks, drinks, and 1-2 bunches of shallots when harvesting or plucking onions. This is done by the landowner as a form of attention and appreciation for his employees [16–19].

3.4. Recruitment and Supervision Patterns

Landowners do not carry out strict supervision because they have trusted the competence and experience of farm workers. Workers are recruited through field coordinators or through social networks between farmers. It provides a flexible and trust-based work system [20]. The pattern of recruitment of agricultural workers based on trust and social networks, as well as a flexible supervision system, shows the existence of strong social capital in the agricultural community of Banda Village. This social capital not only strengthens solidarity between workers but also increases work efficiency and mutual trust between workers and landowners. Study confirms that social capital is a key factor in the sustainability of local economic systems and the empowerment of rural communities. Thus, this study emphasizes the importance of strengthening social and economic support systems for women farm workers to create an inclusive and sustainable agricultural ecosystem [20–22].

This research provides significant scientific benefits in understanding holistically the socio-economic dynamics of women farm workers in the onion agricultural sector. Key findings show that flexible daily wage systems, trust-based recruitment patterns, and the existence of non-material benefits, not only impact economic well-being, but also strengthen social stability and social capital in agricultural communities. The study also reveals how women's farm workers' adaptation strategies – such as time management, family support, and the division of domestic roles – are key to maintaining productivity and a balance in domestic life. The scientific benefit of this research lies in its contribution in enriching the literature on gender, employment, and rural development in Indonesia, particularly by highlighting the role of women as key actors in family and community economic resilience [23,24].

The comparison of this study is based on the limited study that explores in depth the local dynamics of women farm workers, especially in the context of social, cultural, and faith-based work systems in eastern Indonesia. Previous research has tended to focus on macroeconomic or statistical aspects of national statistics without integrating highly influential social and cultural factors at the community level. Thus, this research is needed to provide a more complete picture of the challenges and adaptation strategies of women farm workers, as well as to provide a scientific basis for the formulation of policies that are more gender-responsive and based on local wisdom. This is in line with the recommendations of FAO (2011) and the World Bank (2020) which emphasize the importance of a contextual approach in women's empowerment in the agricultural sector [7].

When compared to other studies, such as studies that highlight the collective adaptation strategies of rural women in Indonesia, which emphasized the importance of the value of cooperation in traditional agriculture, this study reinforces the finding that social and cultural factors greatly determine the success of local agricultural systems. However, this study also adds a new dimension by highlighting flexible wage systems, social network-based recruitment patterns, and the provision of non-

material benefits as a form of appreciation for women farm workers. Thus, the implications of this research not only enrich the scientific discourse on gender and agriculture but also make a practical contribution to designing more inclusive and sustainable policy interventions [17].

4. Conclusion

This study found that women farm workers in Banti Village have an important role in shallot agribusiness. The incentive structure in the form of daily wages and non-material allowances not only supports economic needs but also strengthens social relations and job stability in agricultural communities. In addition, adaptation strategies through time management, family support, and the division of domestic roles allow women to remain productive despite carrying out dual roles. The integration of economic incentives with socio-cultural support is the key to improving welfare, so agricultural policies that are more gender-responsive and based on local wisdom are needed.

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