



Original Article

Investigating Gender Roles and Collaboration in Coffee Management: Evidence from Bener Meriah Farming Women's Group, Aceh Province, Indonesia

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Abstract: Women play a crucial role in coffee management, particularly within the Women Farmers' Group (KWT) in Bener Meriah, Aceh. Their contributions are vital to the success of farming activities, yet they often face the dual challenge of balancing agricultural responsibilities with domestic duties. Despite family support, the persistent burden of household obligations highlights the complexities of their involvement in rural livelihoods. This study examines the role of women in coffee management within the Women's Farmers Group (KWT) of Bener Meriah, Aceh. Despite receiving family support for their participation in farming activities, women face a dual burden due to their domestic responsibilities. Employing a qualitative approach, this study involved KWT members, male participants, KWT leaders, agricultural extension workers, and community leaders. Data were collected through interviews and observations and analyzed using Grounded Theory. The findings reveal that women predominantly engage in operational tasks, such as coffee picking and processing, and often experience fatigue from balancing agricultural work with household duties. However, collaboration between men and women in distributing crop yields promotes a more equitable distribution of roles, thereby fostering gender equality. This study highlights the significance of the Gender and Development (GAD) approach, which emphasizes social relationships between genders, in enhancing women's participation and strengthening cooperation to achieve more equitable prosperity. Coffee management practices at KWT Bener Meriah demonstrate how gender collaboration can sustainably improve production and family welfare.

Keywords: Gender roles; Gender collaboration; Coffee management; Women group



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1. Introduction

Aceh is recognized as one of Indonesia's premier coffee-producing provinces with coffee plantations distributed across multiple districts. However, only five districts possess extensive coffee plantation areas: Central Aceh (50,407 hectares), Bener Meriah (48,163 hectares), Pidie (10,345 hectares), Gayo Lues (5,083 hectares), and South Aceh (1,425 hectares). Bener Meriah Regency ranks as the second-largest coffee plantation region after Central Aceh. The extensive coffee cultivation area in Bener Meriah has rendered the coffee plantation subsector a primary source of subsistence for numerous residents. As coffee farmers, individuals assume diverse roles, such as landowners, cultivators, and farm workers, reflecting their varying economic levels. Family income is strongly linked to motivation, perseverance, and efforts to meet family demands (Nwuke, 2020). Initial observations in the Bener Meriah Regency indicate that many families rely on coffee plantations, including wives who work outside the home to supplement their families' income. Hartati (2014) discovered that women are frequently perceived as breaching norms or nature when engaging in activities outside their homes, particularly without apparent explanations. However, mothers often become part of the family's economic lifeline by working outside their homes. Differences in work between men and women are acceptable in society, as long as they do not produce unfairness. According to Riyanto et al. (2023), gender discrimination frequently reflects men's dominant roles in numerous activities stemming from the patriarchal system (Gruenbaum, 2022).

Women frequently encounter injustice, particularly because of the stress of the multiple tasks they perform. Extensive research and analysis have been conducted to better understand the role of women in coffee management as a component of gender justice in the public realm. In Brazil, for example, women work not only in coffee production, but also as farmers and landowners, as well as in education, research, and coffee-related industries (Ferreira, 2018). Meanwhile, in Guatemala, women assume a more formal role in the coffee cultivation industry, including becoming cooperative heads. This participation improves access to resources, while enhancing food security (Bilfield, 2020). Since the advent of Arabica coffee trees, women's participation in decision-making has increased in various Southeast Asian countries including Laos (Douangphachanh, 2021). However, men continue to control most of the decision-making authority in agricultural households, demonstrating that the New Economic Mechanism (NEM) has had little influence on women's empowerment.

Women in the Bener Meriah Regency have successfully broken-down patriarchal barriers through active participation in the Women's Farmers Group (KWT). Their engagement in managing coffee, the principal area product, contradicts the stereotype that women are involved solely in domestic concerns. KWT serves more than just a gathering place; it is also a platform for women to enhance their skills, attain economic independence, and participate in decisions that affect the well-being of their families and communities. The active participation of women in KWT in Bener Meriah demonstrates that they are not only interested in domestic matters, but also serve as productive and empowered farmers (Margayaningsih, 2021). The KWT allows women to participate in the advancement of the agricultural sector (Budiman, 2023), and this empowerment can lead to increased independence, skills, and collaboration. Women have become change agents, contributing significantly to local social, economic, and environmental changes. The involvement of the Women Farmers' Group (KWT) in the coffee sector has helped improve the lives of women and their families. However, this has resulted in the establishment of dual roles for women, encompassing both domestic and public responsibility. This dual position is frequently prompted by a desire to enhance the family's financial situation (Marsudi 2023).

Women who work in the public sector as coffee farmers not only oversee the coffee production process from planting to harvesting, but also perform household chores such as caring for the house, children, and family. This double responsibility frequently causes women to work longer hours than men, who typically focus on a single task. Nonetheless, this dual role illustrates women's resilience in attempting to enhance the family economy, even though support from all family members, particularly the husband, is required to achieve a balance between labor at home and outside. To address gender inequity resulting from this double burden, men and women must work together, particularly in coffee production. Although KWT is responsible for coffee production, the participation of men, particularly in tasks that demand physical work, such as transportation and distribution, demonstrates a complementary division of labor. Men's support in this context is not prejudice against women, but rather collaboration, demonstrating that men and women working together in coffee management can boost production without burdening one party. This relationship benefits farming groups and strengthens the economies of families and communities in Bener Meriah.

2. Literature Review

Understanding women's roles in agricultural land management requires an examination of their adaptability and resource utilization. Research indicates that women demonstrate greater flexibility and creativity in land use, which is advantageous for female farmer groups (KWT) in managing coffee production. Villamor (2014) observed that women in both highland and lowland villages exhibited more dynamic land-use patterns than men. This finding challenges the notion that strategic decisions regarding land management and coffee production are predominantly male driven. Instead, KWT members display significant adaptability and openness to innovation, with the aim of enhancing the

economic well-being of their families and communities. Villamor and van Noordwijk (2014) further argue that women's participation is a crucial component of the socio-cultural system influencing land use, with population dynamics playing a more significant role in determining land and labor productivity than land characteristics. Consequently, women are instrumental in ensuring sustainable land use and adapting to global challenges such as climate change.

The Women in Development (WID) framework, rooted in the liberal feminist ideology of the early 1970s, has been widely employed in development programs aimed at improving women's well-being. This approach focuses primarily on achieving gender equality by providing equal opportunities and rights to all individuals (Ritzer, 2018). Various development initiatives have sought to address the obstacles women face, particularly in the agricultural sector, which, despite being discriminatory, employs a significant number of women. In the mid-1980s, the Gender and Development (GAD) paradigm began to supersede the WID approach. The GAD framework considers "gender" more relevant than "female," as it emphasizes the social relationships between men and women (Vincent, 2022). This shift recognizes that efforts to establish gender equality that disregard these social ties are likely to fail in bringing about the necessary gender transition.

Cornwall, as cited in Hanifa (2017), argues that development strategies and procedures for achieving gender equality must evolve to include both men and women. Ertürk presents two key reasons for male involvement in gender-equality efforts. First, as perpetrators of gender inequity, men must take responsibility for it. Second, men are also affected by unequal gender structures (Hanifa, 2017). The GAD approach, which views gender as a complex social construct, focuses on gender relationships and the resource distribution between men and women. This transformative gender approach emphasizes the importance of male involvement in achieving gender equality. However, many gender equality initiatives in development projects continue to exclusively target women (Mullinax, 2018), often employing the WID paradigm to enhance women's capacity through training, microcredit services, and gender awareness programs (Haugh, 2016). Phillips' study, as cited in Hanifa (2017), suggests that increasing women's access to loans will be ineffective unless sociocultural and political barriers are addressed. This observation also applies to other gender interventions, highlighting the need for a transformative gender strategy that considers both men and women as single entities in efforts to create gender equality.

In the context of the Women's Farmers Group (KWT) in Bener Meriah, where women manage coffee production but require men's assistance with heavy labor, both the WID and transformative gender approaches are particularly relevant. While WID focuses on women's empowerment through training and resource access, the transformative gender approach emphasizes the need for structural change and partnership between men and women. These complementary approaches support the KWT's efforts to improve the economic well-being of families and communities through women's active participation in coffee production. In addition, this study highlights the crucial role of women in coffee cultivation despite their limited access to and control over resources compared to men. This disparity, particularly evident in Bener Meriah, prompts the research question: "How is gender collaboration in coffee management in the Women Farmers Group (KWT) in Bener Meriah?" Akbarini, as cited in Muhammad Bahrul 'Ilmi (2023), asserts that women's participation in economic activities such as coffee planting contributes to increased family income. This necessitates women to assume dual roles in both the domestic and public spheres. Traditional gender roles, shaped by patriarchal norms, often perpetuate stereotypes that confine women to domestic work (Atkinson 2019; Baxter 2017).

Miller, as referenced in Ronald Candra et al. (2023), suggested that these stereotypes manifest in human attitudes and behavior through rigidity and uniformity. Although men continue to dominate the agricultural sector, women, with their precision and psychological abilities, have not afforded equal opportunities. Ideally, the shared socioeconomic conditions and talent of both genders should promote equal rights in the coffee production industry. Gender analysis is crucial in agriculture, particularly concerning labor division, power distribution, and decision-making processes. Nurhayati et al. (2023) argue that understanding and analyzing gender dynamics are essential to identify these patterns and assess their impact on the empowerment of agricultural communities, especially women. Conversely, Nurmayasari et al. (2020) found that women in farming households generally exhibit parity with men in domestic, farming, and public/social activities, as evidenced by gender-responsive classifications. This is demonstrated by women's participation in various sectors, including household, agricultural, and public domains.

Despite the persistence of patriarchal culture, society continues to recognize women's contributions to numerous activities. Gender equality in mustard farming households is influenced by sociocultural factors, beliefs, economic demands, and community perceptions of family and farming work divisions. Rubin (2014) defines gender roles as the differences in tasks, duties, and responsibilities between men and women. In patriarchal cultures, women are often perceived to be second-class citizens. However, over time, women's roles have become increasingly significant in various domains, including the education, social, legal, and political spheres. Women in agriculture have made substantial contributions to the improvement of family economies (Jabeen, 2020). Feminization in agriculture has created opportunities for women to become more actively involved in agricultural management. Tamang and Paudel (2014) define feminization as the increase in the intensity of women's participation in a sphere of employment or activity. Feminization enables women to make decisions regarding land management, cultivation practices, and agricultural

product marketing strategies, in addition to serving as supporters. This empowers women to better utilize agricultural resources, enhance their skills, and contribute significantly to the economic well-being of their families and communities.

3. Materials and Methods

This study was conducted by the Women Farmers Group (KWT) in Bener Meriah, focusing on coffee management. A qualitative methodology was employed for statistical analysis of eschewing (Moleong, 2010). The epistemological framework of constructivism underpins this research, emphasizing subjectivity in understanding social reality through interactions between researchers and study objects, as well as dialectical processes to reconstruct reality using qualitative methods (Malik, 2016). This approach is interpretative or naturalistic and is conducted in natural settings with diverse and open realities. The research subjects were KWT members, male KWT members, KWT leaders, agricultural teachers, and Bener Meriah community leaders. Both primary and secondary data sources were used. Primary data were collected directly from informants, whereas secondary data were obtained from papers, online journals, and relevant agencies pertaining to gender collaboration in coffee management at KWT Bener Meriah. Informants were selected using incidental sampling, in which samples were randomly chosen based on the research setting. The concept of "information saturation point" suggests that approximately 10 to 15 informants are necessary to reach a stage where new information ceases to emerge (Mason, 2002). Data analysis was conducted qualitatively using Grounded Theory (Glaser, 1967), which involves categorizing data to compare and comprehend issue formulation. The analysis process continued until key categories emerged, allowing the researcher to integrate the data and construct a narrative summarizing the primary themes of the study (Marshall, 2016; Thornberg).

4. Results

4.1. Dual Role of Women in Coffee Management

The Women Farmers' Group (KWT) plays a significant role in coffee management, with female members actively participating in all stages of the coffee production process. However, this involvement creates a dual burden for women, as they must balance their responsibilities as coffee farmers with their domestic duties. Women in KWT are integral to coffee management, from production to post-harvest processing, while simultaneously managing household responsibilities, such as childcare and family care. This dual role often results in extended working hours and increased physical and mental stress for women, a burden not typically experienced by their male counterparts, who tend to focus on a single aspect of work. Despite these challenges, KWT members respond positively to opportunities to increase coffee production. Villamor (2014) observed that women in both highland and lowland villages utilize land more dynamically than men do, challenging the traditional notion that agriculture is primarily male dominated. This is particularly evident in Bener Meriah, where KWT Karya Maju is operated by women, contradicting the widespread belief that men make more strategic decisions regarding land management and agricultural productivity. Instead, women in KWT exhibit significant adaptability and openness to innovation to enhance their families' and communities' economic wellbeing. Research findings indicate that women in the Bener Meriah KWT generally receive family support for their involvement in agricultural activities, particularly coffee management. However, they continue to face social pressures that require them to maintain their full responsibility for household affairs. This creates a double burden, necessitating the division of time and energy between fieldwork and domestic tasks. Although women in this group generally manage their time effectively, they often experience the weight of this dual responsibility.

Women without primary employment outside the home tend to rely more heavily on certain stages of coffee farming, such as sorting and picking, owing to their perceived availability compared to women employed outside the home. Notopuro, as cited in Mince (2021), notes a traditional division of labor in which fathers engage in public work as primary breadwinners, while mothers focus on domestic work. This perspective often reduces women's role in cooking, childbearing, and homemaking. Consequently, women enter the public sphere as farmers must manage both agricultural and household responsibilities. Soerjono Soekanto, as cited in Mince (2021), emphasizes that a role is a dynamic aspect of status; individuals fulfill their roles by exercising their rights and obligations in accordance with their position. Stereotypes associated with domestic tasks create a double burden on KWT members. While actively involved in coffee production activities, such as picking, processing, and sorting, they remain responsible for household matters, including childcare and other domestic tasks. The social pressure to fulfill both roles often lead to physical and mental exhaustion, as domestic responsibilities are not reduced despite intense agricultural involvement. Thus, women in KWT must strike a balance between their economic contribution through coffee management and their domestic obligations.

4.2. Gender Collaboration in Improving Productivity and Welfare

Gender collaboration in coffee management within the Bener Meriah Women's Farmers Group (KWT) plays a crucial role in enhancing productivity and welfare for families and communities. Although women predominate in numerous coffee production processes, men's involvement in physically demanding tasks such as distribution and lifting creates a complementary division of roles. This collaborative approach not only alleviates the double burden

experienced by women, but also improves the efficiency and success of farming enterprises, ultimately strengthening the economic well-being of families and communities in the region. Research has demonstrated that, within the Women Farmers Group, all operational work, including picking, processing, and sorting coffee, is performed by women. While pruning twigs remains a predominantly male task, women are increasingly acquiring this skill.

The distribution of harvests from plantations to processing locations and from processing sites to markets is exclusively performed by men operating outside the KWT organizational structure (see Figure 1). The primary reason for male involvement in distribution is the weight of the produce and challenging terrain, which requires greater physical strength to transport the harvest to markets or other distribution points. Over time, women in the Women's Farmers Group have begun to assume more significant roles in the technical aspects of coffee processing, which were previously managed by men. However, harvest distribution remains the responsibility of men due to its physical demands and long-distance transportation requirements, which are considered more suitable for male workers. Distribution remains the sole area controlled by men, while women continue to expand their roles in other aspects of coffee production and management.



Figure 1. Activities of KWT Karya Maju Makmur Bener Meriah in processing coffee beans

The findings of this study support the Women in Development (WID) theory, which emphasizes enhancing women's welfare through their active engagement in various sectors, including agriculture. In the Bener Meriah Women's Farmers Group (KWT), women play a dominant role in operational activities such as coffee picking and processing. However, the shift towards a Gender and Development (GAD) approach, which underscores the importance of social relations between men and women, is evident in men's involvement in crop distribution. This indicates that gender equality in coffee farming extends beyond increasing women's participation in fostering complementary collaboration between men and women to achieve a more equitable and productive role balance. The transition from a WID to a GAD approach highlights the significance of not only involving women in productive activities, but also understanding how gender roles can be aligned to achieve optimal results. At KWT Bener Meriah, the collaboration between men and women in coffee management demonstrates that physically demanding tasks, such as harvest distribution, performed by men, complement the dominant role of women in production stages, such as picking and processing. This synergy not only enhances productivity, but also creates a more balanced work environment in which the contributions of both genders are recognized and valued. Consequently, the application of GAD principles facilitates the creation of more equitable prosperity in agricultural communities, while strengthening the economic resilience of families in the region. The specific duties and responsibilities of the Karya Maju Bener Meriah Women Farmers Group (KWT) in managing coffee farming are outlined in Table 1, which details the activities of the Women Farmers Group (KWT) Karya Maju in Coffee Management in Bener Meriah.

Table 1. Activities of the Women Farmers Group (KWT) Karya Maju in Coffee Management in Bener Meriah Regency.

No	Activities	Male	Female
1.	Seed Selection		✓
2.	Fertilizer Provision		✓
3.	Land Preparation		✓
4.	Planting Seeds		✓
5.	Regular Fertilization		✓
6.	Crossing		✓
7.	Pruning		✓

No	Activities	Male	Female
8.	Harvesting		✓
9.	Pulper		✓
10.	Washing		✓
11.	Drying		✓
12.	Huller		✓
13.	Sort (DP)		✓
14.	Packaging		✓
15.	Distribution	✓	
16.	Packaging		✓

Table 1 revealed a significant gender-based division of labor in coffee production within the Karya Maju Women Farmers Group (KWT) in Bener Meriah Regency. Table 1 demonstrates that women are predominantly involved in activities such as seed selection and drying, whereas men dominate tasks requiring greater physical exertion, such as distribution. These findings indicate that women have achieved gender equality in coffee production, contributing to the sustainable utilization of coffee land (Villamor, 2014). From an ecofeminist perspective, women's roles in coffee production are crucial for addressing climate change concerns. Ecofeminism posits that women possess substantial potential to mitigate ecological crises resulting from natural resource exploitation through more sustainable approaches. In this context, women in KWT Bener Meriah not only play a vital role in the more precise and technical aspects of agriculture, but also contribute to collaborative efforts in maintaining a healthy coffee farming ecosystem. This collaboration exemplifies that gender equality in labor division is not merely a social issue but is also critical in developing more resilient and sustainable agricultural practices in the face of climate change. This aligns with the ecofeminist viewpoint, which emphasizes the interconnection between women's empowerment and environmental sustainability.

5. Conclusions

This study concludes that women in the Bener Meriah Women's Farmers Group (KWT) play a crucial role in coffee management, particularly in operational activities such as harvesting, processing, and sorting. Despite familial support for agricultural work, women continue to bear a dual burden due to their inherent domestic responsibilities. This dual role often results in challenges in allocating time and energy between agricultural and household tasks, which frequently leads to physical and mental fatigue. However, the collaborative efforts of men and women in harvest distribution activities signify progress towards gender equality in the agricultural sector. A more equitable and efficient distribution of roles is achieved by involving men in tasks that require greater physical exertion. This study emphasizes the significance of the Gender and Development (GAD) approach, which focuses on social relationships between genders, not only enhancing women's participation but also fostering complementary cooperation to generate more equitable prosperity within the community. Ultimately, coffee management practices at KWT Bener Meriah exemplify how gender collaboration can enhance production and family welfare in the long term.

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