

## Gender Responsive Household-based Approach in Development Programs : Why It Matters

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Seeing beneficiaries as one family unit or household with shared goals, assets and needs is an approach that is often used in many development programs. Family members are seen as a group of people that have more or less similar needs and are expected to contribute to achieving the same goals. In one of its edition of 'Knowledge Showcases', the Asian Development Bank (ADB) demonstrates how household-based approach has been used in various settings of poverty reduction programs in countries such as Canada, Vietnam and Srilanka<sup>1</sup>. Indonesia is not foreign to the concept either. Indonesia's conditional cash transfer initiative termed as '*Program Keluarga Harapan*'<sup>2</sup> (Family Hope Program) relies heavily on household-based approach in which social assistance is given to the poorest households that have expecting or lactating mothers and children between 0 and 15 years old. It is convenient for such programs to use the approach since the most commonly used indicator such as wealth rank is, in fact, household-based. Not to mention in poor families, expenditure is usually a result of collective efforts of family members (e.g., husband, wife and children), which later will be calculated against their consumption to determine the family's poverty level. This is another useful reason to use the household as a basis of intervention.

However, the use of the approach needs to be handled with proper care. Using the household as a basic unit of analysis without further looking at the dynamics of individuals within the family may lead to conflicts and ineffectiveness in reaching the intended outcomes in the end. In Indonesia, the headcount of households commonly follows Family Registration Card (*Kartu Keluarga*), which in most cases specifies men as the heads of the households. The needs of women and children are often overlooked with men being the only ones consulted and whose opinions are heard of. In extreme cases, women may not be considered as an entity that deserves equal access to the household's resources since the function has been represented by their husbands. A woman can only be acknowledged when she is a widow or a single-mother, which automatically makes her the head of the household. Nonetheless, in the case of single mothers who live with parents and couples where the wife is a *de facto* breadwinner, women would often go unnoticed<sup>3</sup>.

The practice is widely seen in agricultural programs aimed at improving farmers' household income. Family farms, although registered under the husband's name as the head of the household, are usually managed collectively by all family members. Women and men are both involved in farm work and contribute to all types of labor from land clearing, raising seedlings to postharvest management with various degrees of involvement<sup>4</sup>. It is worth noting, however, men appear to be more dominant in certain tasks, such as land clearing, which is said to require much physical work, as well as trimming, spraying pesticides and making overall decisions in the agricultural production. Despite the obvious contribution of women in the farm, many programs still prefer to apply a limited household-based approach that only acknowledges men farmers, a status that goes hand in hand with their roles as the heads of households. Selection of beneficiaries oftentimes only involves men farmers and does not look into the division of labor between women and men in the farm, and the amount of time spent by women and men in the farm and around the house. Women's knowledge and skills to

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<sup>1</sup> Alibhai, K. (2009). Tackling Extreme Poverty Using a Household-based Approach. *Published in ADB's Knowledge Showcases in April 2009*

<sup>2</sup> Taken from <https://kemsos.go.id/program-keluarga-harapan>

<sup>3</sup> Yumna, A., Febriany, V., Syukri, M., Pereznieta, P., & Malachowska, A. (2012). The politics of gender and social protection in Indonesia: opportunities and challenges for a transformative approach.

<sup>4</sup> The analysis is based on the author's experience being involved in sustainable agricultural and low-carbon development programs in Indonesia.

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manage the farm and challenges faced are never taken into account in the analysis of the issues. Not to mention, women's lack of representation in trainings and farmers gatherings is often seen as women's lack of willingness and interest in capacity-strengthening activities, when in fact women are double-burdened with domestic work and faced with cultural values that prevent them from participating.

Donors and implementing organizations would often turn a blind eye, and later on argue that since it is a household-based approach, the representation of the household is good enough. The argument is that the approach would initiate the transfer of knowledge from the husband to other family members, including his wife. Little do they know that the gender-blind household-based approach may entail a more serious issue which ultimately harms the effectiveness and sustainability of the program. When a farm is run by two people, then it is only logical to involve both. Failing to adhere to the simple math would cause imbalance and inability for both people to fully manage the farm and improve their yields. Since only the husband was trained, he would be the only person who knows how to properly spray and trim the trees, for instance. Then he would not be able to discuss with his wife before making decisions since the knowledge and skills only revolve around him, and not the wife. Improving quality and quantity of agricultural products would be stalled because not all the people who are involved in the farm know what to do and how to do it.

Similar experience was well captured by the Swedish International Agricultural Network Initiatives (SIANI) in 2013<sup>5</sup>. It documented agricultural programs commissioned by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) in the Sub-Saharan Africa and assessed the using of gender lens in the household-based approach of the programs after observing that women and men work and operate differently in carrying out their daily tasks. The strategy was simple yet effective. The programs engaged women and men in the community to assess and identify some of the most evident gender-based inequalities in their homes using various interactive tools and methodologies and later on, together come up with ways and strategies to move forward. The changes and transformation in the community brought about by the gender sensitization approach were astounding. For many men in the community, the assessment was eye-opening. It provided them with a first-hand insight on the contribution of their wives to the farms and the burden women had been experiencing on daily basis. They realized that they did not have to go very far to look for inequalities; they were there all along in their own backyards. The experience led them to be more tactful and strategic in coming up with solutions. Women and men in the target areas learned that increase in productivity and household income would not be achieved without fair share of responsibilities and access to resources within the household. Women and men then learned to share workload around the house and in the farm so that both would have equal opportunities to attend trainings and discussion sessions. The community realized that women farmers need to have the same set of knowledge and skills to manage the farm as men farmers. This would allow the household and farm to achieve its targets and continue functioning even when either one is absent<sup>6</sup>.

This study is compelling evidence on how transformative gender-based approach is in development context. Gender analysis is no longer a preference; rather it has become a prerequisite to achieve the intended outcomes. A closer look into gender division of labor, women's and men's daily time use, and differences in how women and men access resources and their decision making process is essential to better understand how a household works. When it is clear who are doing what and how, it would be easier for a program to design an intervention. Although gender analysis is considered useful in bringing the pieces together, vulnerability of women-headed households is oftentimes overlooked in the process. Women-

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<sup>5</sup> Farnworth, C., Fones-Sundell, M., Nzioki, A., Shivutse, V., & Davis, M. (2013). *Transforming gender relations in agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa*. SIANI.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

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headed households have social and economic vulnerabilities that may be even greater than men-headed households due to multiple burden and limited access to assets and economic resources they often experience. A specific focus to assess women-headed households therefore needs to be set as a priority in every gender-based analysis conducted by donor and implementing organizations specifically in designing the right household-based approach.