

# Women Agency and the Ambiguity of Their Role in Disaster Management

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**Abstract**— Women found their momentum to engage in new forms of participation, accumulate economic and social capital in disaster management. However, it is important to highlight that the types of women agency remain emanates from the periphery of social relations. The significant of economic contributions of their work were perceived as residual, incident and secondary to male income. The purposes of the study is to discuss the support networks alimanted by women during disaster which wasn't recognized as a source of power or status they constructed. The method use in this research was qualitative approach with case study design. The result of the research show that women agency serves the political position of the husband that can refer to and benefit from her knowledge about community members and issues. Agency practices, even though can incubate openly political and recognized forms of participation. They produce new clusters of action that coexist, intersect and negotiate along with legitimate structures.

**Keywords**—women agency; disasaster management; flood

## I. INTRODUCTION

The sociological approach to disaster often addresses issues of social solidarity and conflict that escalate in case of disasters. Hazards and natural events are not controllable by human societies however risks and impacts are distributed in ways that reflect the power relations and social divisions that already exist in a collectivity. Disaster research considers class, ethnic and more recently gender inequalities can exacerbate its effects and expose certain groups to a higher degree of vulnerability.

Feminist scholars had a great influence criticizing mainstream disaster research as male-oriented, bringing visibility to qualitative differences in the way men, women and children are affected by such happenings. Available data from the World Health Organization (WHO) suggests that gender differentiation at all levels of the disaster process related to perception and exposure to risk; preparedness; response; physical and psychological impact; recovery and reconstruction. Women and girls are particularly exposed to violence and adverse health effects in the chaos that might follow the aftermaths of a disaster. Moreover, lack of participation in the decision-making process within the community suggests their specific needs might be insufficiently met.

Gender as a process of collective construction created on sexual differences. By the term of process refer to the never ending social process which not simply given by social and cultural contexts, but they are both challenged

and reinforced in everyday life. As an organizing principle of social life, gender relations is the constitutive part of economic, cultural and social processes. Gender relations is a part of the human experience of disaster since it cannot be lived outside gendered bodies and minds.

The intersecting gender and disaster enquiry usually focus on the idea of vulnerability which demonstrating how gender inequalities exponentially increases as the impact of catastrophes on women or generates specific gendered impacts as well. However, we intended to examine the different types of women agency that emerges from this kind of situation.

Agency focused research approaches individuals, groups and institutions as agents capable of originate social actions and produce impact in social phenomena. This article aims to addresses for the different kinds of female agency that emerges in the event of flooding and landslides in Southern Area of Malang. In this sense, we consider women not only as victims, but as social actors with creative capacity to deal with the aftermaths and to manage their situation of vulnerability. We consider disaster situations might enhance gender inequalities and oppression. Nevertheless, it also offers opportunities for women to engage in new forms of social structure within their families and communities.

This lead to the question: what is specific role of women in disaster preparedness? Are there qualitative differences in the way men and women perceive such events? How women respond to disaster in the households and organizations they participate? How women participate in community leadership and development activity?

## II. DISASTER AND FEMALE AGENCY

Disaster studies have been recognized as a *strategic field* to examine social phenomena once it unveils processes in the core of the making of social relations. Though regarded as extraordinary events, disasters are embedded in social structures and manifest issues related to how social, economic and symbolic resources are allocated in society. In other words, impact of hazards and disasters are not equally distributed, nonetheless reflect relations of power and processes of social differentiation that operates in everyday life [1].

A vulnerability approach to disaster suggests that people's exposure and sensitivity to risk, so as the capacity of resilience, vary greatly across the social spectrum, depending on functions such as ethnicity, class,

education, and so on [2]. Gender is a particularly important category to understand this process given its transversal mechanism that permeates every sector of social life. Available data reveals patterns of gender differentiation persistently disadvantageous for women and girls at all levels of the disaster process [3].

Greater female vulnerability is strongly associated to low socio-economic status, gender discrimination and cultural norms that existed before the coup and became exacerbated in its aftermaths. Neumayer and Plümper [4] uncovered a pattern of persistent gender gap in disaster mortality rates, especially when the (temporary) disrupt of social order exposes women to specific health care issues and gender-based violence. The research show that how corporal dispositions and education might prevent women to acquire physical and emotional equipment to survival. Sexual division of labor very likely restricts female access to information, decision-making processes and spatial mobility; also burdening women with the responsibility of assuring basic survival resources (such as water and food) and nurturing the family in a context of extreme adversity.

Fothergill (1998) argues this approach tends to overemphasize women as victims, even though bringing visibility to their vulnerabilities involves recognizing the specificity of their experience. However, recent study moves towards a comparative approach which searching ways in which gender issues intersects with other patterns of inequalities, echoing in staggered situations of adversity.

The notion of female agency has been brought by feminist scholars to draw attention to the passivity and immobility attributed to women in sociological analysis. According to this point of view, women are often perceived as supporting figures to men's actions and subordinated to male-dominated cultures. Agency was incorporated to the feminist literature steaming the political statement that women are able to resist male domination through everyday practices, mobilizing different forms of capital and strategies to cope and surpass structural disadvantages.

Agency itself is a complex and ambiguous concept in sociological theory, usually formulated in the terms of a theory of action. Are we able to act by ourselves, or are we conditioned by social and cultural backgrounds? Feminist theory implies agency as a synonymous of resistance, i.e., as the capacity of social actors to overcome social constrains and limiting cultural patterns. Elaborating agency through the by names structure-individual or submission-resistance, however, impoverishes the debate by simplifying the mechanism of human action.

Sociological theory developed to overcome approaches that consider agency and structure as separated monolithic blocks, consequently dichotomizing individual action and socio-cultural substrata. Giddens's [5] Structuration Theory considers structure and agency under a reflexive perspective, engaging in an ever-evolving transformative dialectical process. According to the sociologist, structure provides common frames of meaning that enable agency, and human actions might impact social structures in ways that lead to change. Bourdieu [6], through a different theoretical framework, also addresses the two-way causality between agency and

structure. Agents are in constant negotiation with the social fields in which they are embedded, internalizing roles, relations and expectations (i.e., structure) as habitus. By externalizing actions, agents impact these roles and relations.

In disaster studies, female agency has been elaborated in terms of women participation before, during and after the contingency of a disaster. Since 1990, feminists, disaster practitioners and international agencies have been mobilized major conferences in search to attempt gender-sensitive data and methodologies to approach disaster management research, risk reduction and community development by stressing the "key role" of women and children in disaster prevention and the necessity to meet with their specific demands. Even though the literature identifies sexual division of labor as a function of vulnerability, the domestic sphere – where women's responsibilities, time and routine are condensed – can become a strategic site to build practices if risk prevention and resilience development. Female leadership and gendered environmental knowledge, among other gender mainstreaming initiatives, turned into the flagship of sustainable development discourse and community development.

Far from being static, gender patterns comprehend processes of social construction, constantly lived in, reinforced and challenged in everyday life. Victims, disaster practitioners, volunteers and policy-makers are not neutral; their gender identities, values and subjectivities are embodied, shaping perceptions and practices. The contingency of disaster, in this sense, does not simply reproduce negative impacts on underprivileged groups, but provided an opportunity to review gender norms and empower men and women through new forms of economic, political and family insertion.

### III. WOMEN AGENCY IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT

In order to investigate the gender relations in disaster in East Java, We choose Sidoasri as the research location to justify our findings. Sidoasri is the area which suffered by annual flood around November to December. Researchers require quantitative and qualitative data as a means to gather information about the impact, perception and experience of the recovery of women and how it relates to gender patterns and expectations. For analysis purposes, we chose four interviews that propose enrich information to discuss the different types of institutionalization of women before, during and after the floods. Information on disaster response is focused on a fairly large flood that occurred in 2012 and effected their everydayness. Although flooding come about every year and considered a normal condition and almost tolerable, but the disaster in 2012 brought relatively large losses in agriculture and personal properties. Even though there were no human fatalities, but the economic activities of the people paralyzed and created a temporary stagnation condition in the daily routine of the locals.

#### A. *Women and Men Agency in Economics Role during Disaster*

Being a farmer in small scale agriculture activities is a main economic life in the village Sidoasri, disastrous events tend to happened simultaneously to their home and work environments. This description can be seen from

personal experience that even though there is no rigid division of work between productive and reproductive sphere, men usually perform heavy tasks that require physical strength and women organize cooking, cleaning the interior of the house and taking care of children and the old. Both activities of women and men rarely occur simultaneously and interchangeably.

Men combine work with other activities such as chopping wood and coconut plucking. Families who do not possess their own land to work on the farmland owners and get a percentage of the harvest. Women also worked as a farmer and collect clover leaf oil. Gains derived by women seem to be incidental and are considered complementary male wages, which is consistent with the perception of men as breadwinners and women as helpers. Economic scarcity, however, may create conditions that the women's position more permanent practice.

Moreover, the interconnectedness of livelihood in Sidoasri showed the lack of preparation before the flood. Food shortage is likely to occur and villager's food consumption pattern apparently became a way of live which not eligible when their experienced disaster. Such features can be explained by the lack of preparedness culture that produced by type of solidarity among the locals. Thus, delivered from this situation, the household doesn't have the economic resources to maintain food supplies, clothing, gasoline or drugs beyond daily needs.

A disaster is a situation that exacerbates the shortage of resources and recover from the circumstances the women improvisation emerge as a female intelligence especially when the donations was distributed, utilizing family rice stocks or seeking donations. The activities of women in making visible economics fulfillment needs, including the harvesting of coffee and immigrate to the cities are more likely to be chosen by women as a domestic helper during Eid (Eid al-Fitr) holiday. Although there is no evidence that the men do not engage in activities that generated complementary to the extra wages, such practices were not mentioned by the informant. In conclusion, scarcity and lack of monetary resources requires flexibility, creativity and ability to compromise of the household.

Flooding and lack of money appears to be main difficulties for women in the search for alternative and restore the balance of the fragile domestic economy. Women's economic activity was also supported by an enhanced knowledge through daily experience to finance the needs of their families. This behavior may be conditioned by their responsibility to manage the household budget.

### *B. Division of Labour in Disaster Circumstances*

Departing from the experience of the flood disaster that hit villagers Sidoasri in 2011, the results of in-depth interviews appear a configuration of division of labor by sex with a patterned shape based on the role. Although they assume that the flooding impact were insignificants for their families, especially for food consumption because it prepared themselves from the disaster situation but in fact when the bigger disaster struck, they face serious challenges to fulfill they daily need.

They must engage in activities to culvert together such as cleaning the village roads of fallen trees and others. Primarily, in post-disaster condition, women domain remains were placed in the domestic work such as cleaning house of mud, cleaning the home furnishings and to prepare the daily food consumption. Husband's role relatively changed since also involved in re-arrange their filthy condition of the house after the flood.

In the structure of rural communities, the households were heavily influenced by the spatial aspect. Houses, as individual dwellings oriented sphere while if there are communal activities to express social cohesion. The nature of solidarity on Sidoasri thus can be modeled based on the scale handling of the interests of an individual and communal. On social assistance, the villagers Sidoasri never obtain any help form of basic needs. However, relief is patterned by an agent who is close to the power control nets assistance. They need knowledge of social networks as a safety valve which is less developed by the community.

### *C. Women Social Standing and Disaster*

During the disaster occurred, households organize themselves in the logic of sexual division of labor. Men act masculine stereotypes to venture out of the house when the flood started to happen, save livestock (chicken and pork) to a safer place, keeping the house and helping neighbors. Women tend to stay inside with the children and their parents or evacuate to higher ground or to a place to stay close to home. Cleaning work starts after the water level decreases. Not much can be done when the water is high, and because family members gathered in the house (also paralyzed school activities), there may be an increase in women's domestic workload becoming increasingly to take care of kids, cooking and so forth.

Both men and women cleaning the house and its surroundings, and men tend to perform tasks such as carrying heavier tree branches and other materials carried by the water. Women focus on the house, cleaning the mud off the floor, closet, clothes and other objects. Both men and women visiting relatives and neighbors to check their condition and offering material assistance.

Female institutions when disasters seem oriented to the human element. Protect and ensure the safety of others, visiting relatives, listening and ultimately provide material assistance. This action is considered important both for objective and subjective recovery from flooding. Oversee neighbors and relatives is socially motivated actions to maintain social solidarity and contribute to the maintenance of social networks among villagers.

Lack of clear or rigid separation between private and public affairs shows that interpersonal relationships and acquaintances are the main mechanism for collective mobilization. Data shown the wife clearly more assertive in articulating the victim such as name and more information about the household and flood victims in 2012. It is interesting that while women had a capability to articulate their opinions which suggests that the tasks and knowledge of the position of the man's social status, in fact, it occurred together.

The role of women more in terms of how to organize the equipment or goods at home to the safer, in the event of women considered more agile and skilled. While to

organize the items that physical demanding, men are considered better to perform these activities. It is also seen, when there is a joint activity of society for the prevention of flooding in conducting mutual cooperation together, and in this case the role of the man very large for cleaning the drains around their villages while women, usually only prepare drinking water and cake or meal to be distributed to the working men and women participate if cleaning drains, just be around the house and a small-scale work. At the time, men and women work together to prevent or remove the water entering the home, usually men will work extra to make a small channel for the water to smooth out or otherwise made a mound of earth so that water does not enter the home, while women will little need to go the extra mile to take care of belongings inside the house to dry when it flooded or put in a place that is not affected by flooding in or around the house. If there is a village meeting on development planning or the provision of facilities in flood risk reduction measures such as making embankments or drainage, usually involved men while women do not. It is more due to the understanding of the men could be representative of a member of the family, including the women. In terms of disaster risk reduction, the role of women is greater than man.

If a child Get sick to the health center, an activity which is mostly done by women, men only help women with female usher bring the child to place the health center is located. Male role here only as a means of transportation alone. Likewise, by bringing the child to the health center is only done by women, men just want to help if the child is seriously ill condition, whereas if only mild illness, then it becomes the responsibility of the mother. Likewise, if a child is fussy because of illness role women are more dominant this is caused by the nature of the mother instinct (nature of motherhood; grindstones, custody) while men are more to alert only, when the woman (wife) overwhelmed to handle it and to take other alternatives like hospital. In contrast, visible role due to local customs placed the men to provide for his wife and children as well as a trustee, who is responsible for her younger siblings, especially the women and also the parents, especially the mother, while the wife is not an obligation to make a living in the household and on the family of his parents, but if it is done merely the willingness, because this is the basic one, the men gained access to the legacy or the major sources owned by the family or other resources.

#### *D. Does Women Could Reclaim The Domestic Domain?*

Men act masculine stereotypes to venture out of the house when the flood started to happen, save livestock (chicken and pork) to a safer place, keeping the house and helping neighbors. Women tend to stay inside with the children and their parents or evacuate to higher ground or to a place to stay close to home. It is important to emphasize that this type of institution designated by the analysis showed that the protagonist of women still come from the periphery of social relationships. Significant economic contribution of their work is still regarded as the rest of the incident and secondary to male income. Network support and recognize women through visiting neighbors are not recognized as a source of power or status - on the contrary, it serves the political position of the husband as head of RT, which can be consulted and

benefit from the knowledge of community members and issues.

The emancipation of women is also quite important. Nevertheless the acknowledgement of the involvement of women in disaster management is marginalized. For example, only about his role at the level of domestic activity, which is not far from the role of mothers when at home, is cooking. The involvement in policy-making meetings on disaster management as well as involvement in activities of training on disaster not seem real. As a result, the handling of aid for women, which of course has different needs to men, yet completely untouched. Indeed, there is help that is specific to the needs of women, however this kind of assistance transmitted indirectly to the women.

Conditions are also quite alarming in times of disaster is the lack of toilets for the citizens, so the need for a bath, and small bowel is done directly in the flood water, which would also greatly impair their health, especially for women and children. One informant said that after the occurrence of floods usually spread the disease are diarrhea and itching. The nature of the disaster may also increase the vulnerability of women. Reproductive health and sexual health, which was never monitored by the health department. Post-flood many women experience itching on his cock. Mothers feel shame and taboo to tell the problem related to reproductive health and sexual health in the medical team. They only show the disease in the body itching, diarrhea and vomiting, without mentioning the issue of reproductive health and reproductive health.

In response to the flood disaster in the village has not been widely Sidoasri involve women, especially in making policy and a strategy for disaster management. In the event of a disaster, women involved in the handling out the disaster impacts. However only those who serving in government services involved in a variety of emergency response training though. Women at all excluded, that to meet the needs of women such as sanitary that have been provided because there are donors who also contributed pads. Whereas if you are pregnant or giving birth to the existing health center midwife on duty at each post. In addition, many medical personnel from outside. If there are women involved in disaster management, involvement only in case of floods that served as the manager of groceries, while others are done by men.

Women play an important role in times of disaster, because in addition to still carry out their duties and functions in the family care giver, they also often act as heads of households and the main breadwinner, the backbone of the family, especially when he had to be a single parent since her husband lost their jobs. Rice plants float and fish in ponds were lost, then the husband has no job at all. Not infrequently women are also involved in social activities such as helping at a soup kitchen and health posts. In disaster situations, as well as the burden of women's roles and actually increased. Women not only as an object that must be protected, but also became the subject of an active role as an agent of change.

Giddens (1984) established that the actions of individuals or institutions, enabled by a common framework of meaning given by the structural position of

the individual. Therefore, the female protagonist could have a domestic position and subordination as its habitat. Women would leave the outskirts of action and reclaim the public? The practice of the institution, although it can hatch open forms of political participation and recognized, does not claim the relationship was ousted from power in the workplace. Instead, they generate new cluster actions coexist, intersect and negotiate with the legitimate structure.

The most important factor in the long term, in the form of social relations, articulated by the opinions such as: "*I have helped*". This expression is an essential grounding in assessing the role of women because it describes the emerging understanding of social empathy through social relationships. Nor can it be forgotten that there is a dimension of self-governance or self-help in building solidarity as the key to developing a closer relationship.

Regarding social relations, the society able to organize themselves and expressed solidarity is a key indicator that they have undergone full restoration conditions. In the short term, the handling mechanism to the various issue due to disaster such as income shortage, physical and psychological health, should be perceived as the perception of the informant's point of view. On the other hand, facilitate and strengthen social bonds that meaningful action for the recovery efforts. It can thus be emphasized that the social bond capital for community empowerment to rebuild their lives.

The importance of social ties were reflected in the lives of women in East Java since thereby strengthen social capital and open social networks. Social capital is associated with the theories related to human capability to enhance the relationship that is built up between the individual-social in a social network and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. Setting rural community characteristics inherent in the female selfhood in Sidoarjo seems to be important to understand the context of women's agency within the framework of life post-disaster recovery. Their social networks are close to the family (children, parents, relatives, and neighbors) showed that there was no trouble when they ask for help during an emergency occurs. In emergency conditions, the husband and wife when asked for help from their close relatives are not facing a problem because there has been an intensive social contact between societies.

Social relations between neighbors relatively strong so that women can count on the presence of other people currently have to survive. Here is seen the importance of mutual aid between neighbors. Social networks among neighbors assists as social capital essential to the life of victims of post-disaster recovery.

In addition to the education, mobility factors also affect the vulnerability of women. In a society with a strong patriarchal culture, women's mobility is very limited, because women are bound by the obligation to perform the function of reproduction and domestic work. The isolated conditions that often put women in unsafe conditions. It could be when a disaster occurs, women remain at home, but it threatens the safety of his life, [7]

following the safety of their children. While the man, which is constructed as breadwinner, breadwinner, in daily more are in the public spaces that have greater access to disaster information, as well as being disadvantaged due to occupational segregation and flexible mobility. On the other hand, it refers to the internalizing values of masculinity.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

This study shows that the positioning of women in disaster events classified on the essential factors, namely: a) Social Networking b) the vulnerability of Psychological and Health c) Economic and Financial Situation. When examined more in detail then there is a strategic and pragmatic nature of the above factors in shaping women as part of an important agency in the event of a disaster.

The women involvement in the prevention of disaster showed insensitivity to gender issues. Nevertheless, women gender role condition is causing injustice against women (including children and the elderly) the opportunity to gain access, as well as the benefits of participation and control of policies, programs, and disaster relief.

Policy makers and implementing disaster management often understand disaster management does not take sides or the so-called gender-neutral. Executing disaster affected communities generally seen as a homogeneous group, whereas women and men are different, not only biologically, but also differ in needs, roles and gender status. This has an impact on the responsibilities, rights, obligations, experience, including in gaining access to and benefit from development programs, and to promote women's participation in any rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts.

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