

Contributing but Unrecognised: Gender Dynamics in Natural Resource Management among Women Farmers in Kubu Raya

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Abstract

Natural resources are the primary livelihood base for farming communities in rural areas, and their management involves both men and women. This study examines the gender-based division of labour in natural resource management within farming communities in Sungai Raya Sub-district, Kubu Raya Regency, focusing on the agricultural and fisheries sectors. It aims to analyse women's roles, identify the barriers they face in accessing and controlling resources, and evaluate how gender roles affect resource control and family welfare. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, participatory observation, and documentation involving male and female farmers, community leaders, and local officials, then analysed thematically. The findings reveal significant gender disparities: women are heavily involved in domestic tasks such as crop maintenance and food processing, yet are largely excluded from strategic decisions on the allocation and use of natural resources. This inequality is reinforced by prevailing social and cultural norms and constrains both family welfare and the sustainability of resource management. The study underlines the need for gender-responsive empowerment through access to training, technology, financial resources, and participation in decision-making and more inclusive policies to achieve fair and sustainable natural resource management.

Keywords

gender dynamics; natural resource management; rural community; sustainability; women's empowerment



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INTRODUCTION

Natural resources constitute the primary livelihood base for farming communities in rural areas. In managing these resources, men and women play different roles; however, women's roles are often not formally recognised despite their substantial contribution. Inequality in access to and control over natural resources places women in a disadvantaged position, particularly in strategic decision-making concerning the allocation and use of resources.

Sungai Raya Sub-district in Kubu Raya Regency is an area with prominent agricultural and fisheries activities, including in Tebang Kacang and Mekar Sari villages. In these communities, women are actively involved in crop maintenance, the processing of agricultural products, and the use of fishery products for household needs. Nevertheless, this involvement is not matched by the recognition or control they hold over the results of their work. Prevailing social and cultural norms further reinforce such an unequal division of roles.

This condition warrants examination because gender inequality affects not only family welfare but also the sustainability of natural resource management. Accordingly, this study aims to: (1) analyse the role of women in natural resource management in rural areas; (2) explore the barriers and challenges women farmers face in accessing and managing natural resources; and (3) evaluate how gender roles influence control over natural resources and their impact on family welfare. The study is expected to help fill the gap in the literature on gender roles in natural resource management in Indonesia and to inform more inclusive and gender-just development policies.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. The research was conducted in Sungai Raya Sub-district, Kubu Raya Regency, particularly in Tebang Kacang and Mekar Sari villages. The research subjects comprised male and female farmers involved in natural resource management, community leaders, and government officials associated with resource-governance policy. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGD), participatory observation, documentation, and a literature review. The data were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), namely by identifying, organising, and interpreting the patterns of themes emerging from the field data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Women's Role in Natural Resource Management

Women's role in natural resource management in Sungai Raya, particularly in agriculture and fisheries, is highly significant even though it is frequently unrecognised formally. Women are largely involved in the domestic dimensions of resource management, such as crop maintenance, the processing of agricultural products, and the use of fishery products for household needs. This substantial involvement is not always matched by recognition of, or control over, the outcomes,

so that women are active in production yet limited in commanding its results (Marina & Putri, 2025).

This pattern reflects a socially constructed gendered division of labour in which women's work is naturalised as an extension of their domestic responsibilities rather than acknowledged as productive economic activity (Saguni, 2020). Because such tasks nurturing seedlings, weeding, harvesting, drying, and processing produce are performed within or around the household, they tend to become statistically and socially invisible, absent from formal records of agricultural output and from the categories through which "farmers" are officially counted. The consequence is a persistent gap between the intensity of women's labour and the visibility of their contribution, a gap that in turn shapes how resources, incentives, and recognition are subsequently distributed within the community.

The distinction between being involved and being in control is central to understanding this situation. Drawing on the access control framework, women in Sungai Raya clearly have access to natural resources and participate actively in their use, yet they exercise limited control over the strategic decisions and the benefits that flow from them (Putri et al., 2025). Access without control leaves women dependent on male relatives for decisions about what to plant, when to sell, and how income is allocated, so that their productive agency does not translate into economic authority. This asymmetry is precisely what renders their role, in the words of the finding above, significant yet formally unrecognised.

Comparable dynamics have been documented across rural and coastal Indonesia. Studies of coastal women in Aceh Utara (Apriani & Rahayu, 2024), of women's participation in local economies through ecotourism in Maluku (Afdhal, 2023), and of women farmer groups engaged in horticulture (Marina & Putri, 2025) all portray women as indispensable to production and post-harvest activity while remaining marginal in ownership and decision-making. Read through an ecofeminist lens, women's sustained, hands-on engagement with land and water also positions them as holders of situated ecological knowledge (Gultom, 2024). Recognising and valuing this role is therefore not merely a matter of fairness; it is a precondition for more accurate agricultural planning and for resource governance that draws on the community's full knowledge base.

Barriers to Women's Access to and Control over Resources

A key barrier faced by women farmers is the gender inequality that prevents them from exercising full control over the agricultural and fishery products they

manage. In addition, community understanding of the importance of sustainable natural resource management remains limited (Kasim, Roslan, et al., 2025). One informant emphasised this point:

“There are several obstacles we face. First, the community’s understanding is still limited regarding the importance of sustainable natural resource management ...” (Interview with the Head of Hamlet)

Another barrier is the unequal access to agricultural training and technology, which is more often directed at men, thereby constraining women from developing their capacity to manage agricultural produce more efficiently and sustainably.

These obstacles are simultaneously structural and cultural. The limited community understanding of sustainable management noted by the informant does not affect men and women equally: where knowledge, extension services, and technology are channelled primarily through male household heads and male-dominated forums, women are placed at the end of the information chain and must rely on partial or second-hand knowledge. The barrier is thus not a lack of willingness or capability on the part of women, but an institutional arrangement that systematically routes opportunities away from them and towards men.

The unequal distribution of training and technology is a key mechanism through which the gender gap is reproduced over time. When capacity-building is directed mainly at men, women are denied the very skills that would allow them to move from routine, low-recognition tasks towards more productive and better-remunerated roles. This mirrors evidence that women’s empowerment in farming hinges on deliberate, targeted access to training, financial resources, and decision-making space (Kasim, Roslan, et al., 2025), and that gender gaps in decision-making tend to persist unless institutions actively counteract them (Betrilia et al., 2024). Without such counter-measures, each cycle of investment in male capacity widens the initial gap rather than closing it.

Addressing these barriers therefore requires gender-responsive interventions rather than gender-neutral ones. Extension programmes, information dissemination, and technology transfer need to be designed to reach women directly through scheduling, venues, and facilitators that fit women’s time and mobility constraints. Collective vehicles such as women farmer groups and joint business groups can serve as effective entry points for delivering training, pooling capital, and strengthening women’s bargaining position (Azmi et al., 2024; Marina & Putri, 2025). In this sense, removing barriers is less about isolated projects and more about redesigning the institutions of rural resource governance so that access for women reliably converts

into meaningful control.

The Influence of Gender on the Division of Tasks

The gender-based division of tasks is strongly felt and greatly affects how natural resources are managed and the household economy. In Tebang Kacang and Mekar Sari villages, women are generally more involved in household-related work, such as tending crops and processing agricultural products for daily needs. Although important and skill-intensive, such work is often regarded as “domestic” oriented towards maintenance rather than decision-making. Men, by contrast, tend to control the strategic decisions that directly affect family income.

The way tasks are divided carries consequences that extend well beyond the allocation of work. When women’s activities are framed as “domestic” and men’s as “productive”, the labelling itself assigns value: maintenance work is treated as a natural duty, while decision-making work is treated as expertise deserving authority. This symbolic hierarchy, rather than any real difference in skill or effort, underlies the concentration of strategic decisions in men’s hands (Saguni, 2020). In practice, therefore, the household division of labour operates simultaneously as a division of power that quietly determines whose voice counts in economic matters.

This concentration of decision-making has tangible material effects. Because men typically determine what is produced for the market, how yields are sold, and how income is spent, women’s intensive labour does not grant them a proportionate say in the choices that shape family livelihoods. The pattern is consistent with evidence that gender gaps in decision-making persist across domains of rural and household life (Betrilia et al., 2024) and with the observation that access to resources seldom translates into control for women unless the underlying power relations are explicitly addressed (Putri et al., 2025). The division of tasks, in other words, is also a division of opportunity.

Transforming this arrangement is therefore partly a matter of shifting norms and partly a matter of institutional design. Gender-based approaches to village development have shown that deliberately involving women in planning and decision forums can begin to rebalance authority and reshape expectations about who counts as a legitimate decision-maker (Rahmadani & Agustina, 2024). Practical measures reserving seats for women in farmer and resource-management groups, recognising processing and post-harvest work as skilled productive labour, and making household and community decisions more participatory can gradually loosen the link between the domestic labelling of women’s work and their exclusion from strategic control.

Impact of Gender Inequality on Sustainability and Welfare

Gender inequality in natural resource management has a considerable impact on the welfare of women farmers' families. Although women play a vital role in managing agricultural and fishery products, they often do not receive a fair share of the fruits of their hard work (Ikhwan et al., 2024). According to one woman farmer, although women are directly involved in tending crops and processing produce, important decisions on the distribution of yields and the use of natural resources are more often taken by men, usually the husband or head of the household. This creates a tangible inequality that, in the long run, can hamper the sustainability of resource management and depress family welfare.

The welfare implications of this inequality operate through the distribution of benefits. When decisions about the sale of produce and the use of income are concentrated in male hands, women's substantial labour is not reliably rewarded with a fair share of the returns, which can entrench their economic dependence and constrain their capacity to invest in the household's nutrition, health, and education (Ikhwan et al., 2024). Inequality in control thus translates into inequality in well-being, and the family as a whole bears the cost of underusing the economic agency of half of its members.

The sustainability implications are equally significant. Excluding women from strategic management means excluding a group with deep, practical knowledge of crops, soil, water, and seasonal cycles from precisely those decisions where such knowledge is most valuable. Ecofeminist scholarship emphasises that women's close relationship with the environment makes their participation an asset for conservation and sustainable use (Gultom, 2024), while research on gender and agriculture links the achievement of sustainable-development targets to genuine gender equality in the sector (Ikhwan et al., 2024). Where women are sidelined, resource management loses knowledge, resilience, and a measure of its legitimacy.

These findings underline the need for gender-responsive empowerment as a route to both equity and sustainability. Expanding women's access to training, technology, and finance, and strengthening their participation in decision-making, have been shown to enhance the effectiveness of resource management and the welfare of coastal and rural households alike (Kasim, Roslan, et al., 2025; Urbaningrum, 2025). More inclusive rural-development strategies that build on local potential and distribute benefits more evenly (Benita et al., 2023) can help ensure that the contribution of women farmers is not only recognised but also rewarded so that fairness and long-term sustainability come to reinforce, rather than undermine, one

another.

CONCLUSION

Gender roles in natural resource management among farming communities in Sungai Raya Sub-district, Kubu Raya Regency, exert a significant influence even though they are frequently unrecognised formally. Women contribute substantially, especially in agriculture and fisheries, but are confined to domestic tasks and largely excluded from strategic decision-making. Unequal access to agricultural training and technology constitutes a major barrier for women farmers in developing their capacities. This inequality affects not only family welfare but also the sustainability of natural resource management. Gender-responsive empowerment is therefore needed through expanding women's access to training and technology, strengthening their involvement in decision-making, transforming social norms that limit women's roles, and formulating more inclusive and gender-just natural resource management policies.

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