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# Transformation of the Role of Women Farmers in the Informal Sector: Dynamics of Gender Change and Social Structure in Farming Communities in Konda Sub-district, South Konawe Regency

Syaifudin Suhri Kasim<sup>1\*</sup>, Jamaluddin Hos<sup>1</sup>, Siti Aida Adha Taridala<sup>2</sup>, Sulsalman Moita<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Sociology, Halu Oleo University, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Agriculture, Halu Oleo University, Indonesia

\*Corresponding Author, Email: syaifudinskasim@uho.ac.id

### Abstract

The main objective of the study was to determine the dynamics of gender change and changes in social structure in the transformation of the role of women farmers in the informal sector, especially in the Farmer Community in Konda District, South Konawe Regency. This type of research is descriptive qualitative using a case study approach. The subjects in this study were farmer households. The research informants consisted of all elements involved in wet-rice farming activities and the informal sector. Farm women and farmers as the main informants; village heads/farmer group leaders as key informants and agricultural extension workers were selected as supporting informants. The informant selection technique was carried out using the snow ball sampling method, i.e. researchers first looked for key informants who had in-depth knowledge on the focus of this research. Data collection techniques through in-depth interviews and participatory observation. The collected data were analyzed using category analysis and theme analysis models. Data validity techniques, researchers used source triangulation and technique triangulation. The results showed that women farmers face the dynamics of gender and social structure changes that affect their roles and contributions in agricultural activities and encourage them to transform in the informal sector. The transformation has also caused changes in productive and reproductive roles. In addition, the transformation of peasant women in the informal sector has led to changes in status and power in peasant households, shifts in interaction patterns among peasant women from the agricultural sector to the informal and community sectors, and changes in social layers in the peasant community due to changes in the size of agricultural land ownership and structural changes due to agricultural modernization.

Keywords: Gender Dynamics, Informal Sector, Role Transformation, Social Structure, Women Farmers.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The transformation of the role of women farmers is an interesting phenomenon to study, especially in the midst of dynamic social and economic changes in many farming communities. Rijswijk et al. (2021) argue that the transformation process should be seen as both a natural phenomenon and an active process of the social system behind rural agricultural activities.

Over the past few decades, women's experience in agriculture has grown significantly. They are now considered key actors in the agricultural sector. According to Serpossian et al. (2022) this is mainly due to their involvement in practices outside of productive agriculture, especially in the informal sector. Several authors have pointed out that farm women are now more involved in nonfarm activities (informal sector), thus according to Shortall et al. (2017), providing an opportunity for farm women to become the main actors of the transformation from the agricultural sector to the informal sector.

Yusuf et al. (2021) argue that the transformation of farm women into the informal sector is carried out when their traditional role in the agricultural sector is diminishing, followed by the narrowing of their agricultural land ownership due to land commercialization. In addition, Kurniawan, 2021 states that there is also evidence that agricultural mechanization has contributed to the decline in women's employment in agriculture. Even according to Sundari (2020), findings from several studies show that most women workers are in the informal sector.

The transformation of the role of farm women in the informal sector has resulted in gender dynamics and changes in social structure. Farm women do not only contribute to the agricultural sector. Farm women in general are also responsible as housewives for farming families, so they have a dual role. Prasetyani, (2021) argues that farm women are sometimes faced with three jobs: production, reproduction, and social community roles. This, according to Sundari (2020),

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shows that the role of farm women reflects changes in social structure, especially in household responsibilities. Heckert et al. (2021) stated that the transformation of the role of peasant women in the informal sector is part of structural transformation, which has an impact on the social order of rural communities. Meisanti & Tenri, (2016); Herrfahrdt-Pähle et al., (2020), argue that the impact is evident from changes in the social structure in the community, in the form of shifts in status and power in farmer households, changes in social relations and the occurrence of social layers in poor farming communities.

Farm women in the social structure are considered as servants of their husbands who often have limitations and freedoms. Prasetyani, (2021) argues that this situation shows that from a gender perspective, women still experience socio-cultural discrimination.

In South Konawe District, Konda Sub-district, farm women have undergone a significant transformation in their role, from being only involved in traditional agricultural activities to being more diverse in the informal sector, such as trade and home industries.

Research on this phenomenon is becoming increasingly important given the diverse impacts on gender dynamics and social structures in agrarian societies. Timsina et al. (2023) argue that historically, peasant women have often been limited to domestic roles or small-scale farming, which is reflected in the gender norms that govern their lives. However, with economic and social changes occurring both locally and globally, peasant women in Konda Sub-district of South Konawe Regency have experienced increased participation in the informal sector in response to new challenges and emerging economic opportunities.

Sinclair, (2017) argues that, there are several reasons that cause women to contribute to the informal sector, one of which is the result of agricultural modernization which causes women to lose employment opportunities in the informal agricultural sector. Timsina et al., (2023), the dynamics of this transformation also show changes in the social structure in farming communities. The impact of the transformation is known to vary by region and at the household and personal levels. Leder, (2022), changes in the role of women farmers not only reflect economic changes, but also reflect shifts in the understanding of gender roles in agrarian societies. Lawless et al. (2019) argue that strong gender norms still influence women's decisions and access to resources. (Lawless et al., 2019), but these changes suggest the possibility of opening up new spaces for women's empowerment at the individual and community levels.

This study aims to determine the dynamics of gender change and changes in social structure in the transformation of the role of peasant women in the informal sector, especially in the Farmer Community in Konda District, South Konawe Regency. Thus, this research is expected to provide valuable insights for the development of more inclusive policies and more effective empowerment programs for peasant women, as well as generate a deeper understanding of social and economic change in agrarian communities.

### **Methods**

This type of research is descriptive qualitative with a case study approach. This research was conducted from January 2024 to May 2024. Artha, (2023) argues that qualitative research uses subjects and informants, where the subjects in this study are farmer households. Research informants consisted of all elements involved in the activities of wet-rice farming and the informal sector. Farm women and farmers as the main informants; Village heads or farmer group heads as key informants. Agricultural extension workers were selected as supporting informants, as they have experience or knowledge of the phenomenon under study, although they are not directly involved. The informant selection technique was carried out using the snow ball sampling method, i.e. first the researcher looks for key informants who have in-depth knowledge on the focus of this research. Then the key informant shows other informants who can be met and understand more about the problem being studied, then this informant then appoints the next informant again and so on until there is saturation of the data/information needed in accordance with the focus and objectives of the study. As a result, 20 main informants were found as the main data source. This method is carried out to obtain the authenticity and quality of data/information until the level of saturation. Data collection techniques through in-depth interviews and participatory observation. The collected data were analyzed using an inductive approach with theme analysis and category analysis techniques. Data validity

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techniques, using source triangulation and technique triangulation. Source triangulation is used to test the credibility of data by checking the data that has been obtained based on various data sources such as interviews, archives, and other documents, and the author takes important data and focuses the research. Triangulation techniques are used to test the credibility of data by checking the data that has been obtained from the same source using different techniques.

This analysis involves the whole process of searching while comparing information, selecting data/information and grouping according to the type and category of data/information (Spradley, 1997; in Wijaya, 2018). The study also involved other stakeholders, such as local government, farmer organizations, and local communities, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the activities of women farmers, as well as the social and economic context in the area.

#### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### Dynamics of Gender Change in the Transformation of Women Farmers in the Farmer Community

Gender dynamics in farming communities reveal the changing roles and responsibilities of women and men in agriculture. In the course of its history, economic and social changes have affected the traditional role of women in agriculture, resulting in a significant transformation in the structure and dynamics of work in the informal sector. According to Amalia et al. (2022), the dynamics of gender change can be seen from the changing roles of women farmers when they transform into the informal sector.

In the farming community in Konda Sub-district, the socio-economic dynamics are not only reflected in changes in work patterns and gender-based divisions, but in practice there is an understanding of gender awareness, such as in reproductive matters, especially in household domestic activities, which were initially always borne by farm women, but with their transformation to the informal sector, men (husbands) have taken part together in doing domestic activities in the morning, such as for breakfast and lunch before they carry out their respective activities.

This is according to Abidin et al. (2023), that the patriarchal tradition, which has been considered to still strongly influence the division of labor and decisions in agrarian societies, has now slowly shifted and changed in this perception.

In the farming community in Konda Sub-district, the dynamics of gender roles show a high intensity when farm women transform into the informal sector. Productive roles are not only the dominant domain of men, but farm women are even more active, generally working in the informal sector, so that their contribution to the household economy is quite large. The division of labor is carried out in a way that men continue to play a role in the agricultural sector by cultivating rice fields and vegetable crops, while farm women run trading businesses in the informal sector, such as selling vegetables, fruits and or working in the household industry. But at certain times, both men and women can carry out the same activities on vegetable farms in harvesting activities. The transformation of farm women in the informal sector is often faced with various challenges, especially technological developments. This is because some of the farm women who are over the age of 50 are generally not accustomed to using communication tools in marketing their merchandise, because since the beginning of trading, they have been accustomed to trading directly from home to consumers' homes. Therefore, the economic transformation that occurs among farm women often creates new challenges and opportunities. This is relevant to the findings of Salihin (2019), who explained that economic transformation in farming communities often raises new challenges and opportunities for women. The same thing is also stated by Stringer et al. (2020), that the emergence of new technologies, policy changes, and development interventions form a new framework in which women farmers operate.

In Konda Sub-district, South Konawe Regency, the influence of gender norms in the households of farming communities has changed a lot along with the growing awareness of men of the importance of building gender equality in the household. According to Ikhwan et al. (2023), this awareness increasingly provides opportunities for women farmers to develop their roles in the informal sector. However, according to Glazebrook et al. (2020), their contributions are often not recognized or valued proportionally.

In Konda Sub-district, the transformation of farm women in the informal sector has affected the quality of their labor, because the change of work from the

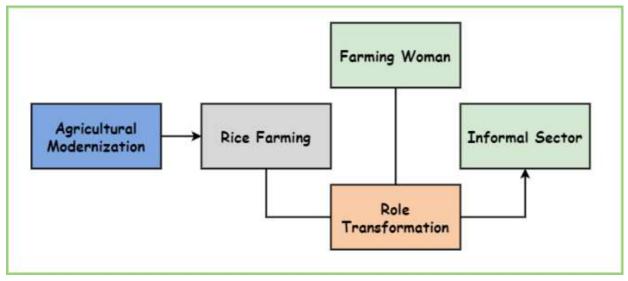
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agricultural sector to the informal sector requires an adjustment to new work skills, not just selling but also other skills such as: the ability to market, manage capital, maintain relationships with consumers and several other marketing techniques. Similarly, for farm women who work in the household industry, they must be able to adjust to the new type of work that requires new skills that are different from before. This is in line with the findings of Yuniashri et al. (2023), that economic and social changes have affected the quality of women's labor in the informal sector.

Farm women in farming communities in Konda Subdistrict are one of the backbones of the family, sometimes faced with three jobs: production or work, reproduction, and roles in the community. Abidin et al. (2023) state that farm women are at least responsible for several aspects of farming family life. They maintain household food security, manage the household economy, and utilize land and leisure time.

The transformation of farm women in the informal sector has led to them becoming the backbone of informal sector sustainability, and their role in the division of labor between productive and reproductive roles has undergone significant changes. In the past, farm women were traditionally responsible for reproductive work in the household, such as taking care of children, cooking, and caring for the family, while men usually managed productive work in the field, such as farming and raising livestock. However, with the passage of time and growing awareness of gender equality, the role of farm women has undergone significant evolution. They not only maintain their responsibilities in reproductive work, but are also increasingly actively involved in productive work in the informal sector. Sabar et al. (2023) argue that women have an important contribution to the economic resilience of farmer households. The same thing was also stated by Babus, (2018), that women make an important contribution to the agricultural and rural economy in all developing countries. Similarly, Ugwu, (2019) argues that women play an important role in every field of agricultural activity and the informal sector, even women work harder and longer than men. In the farming communities of Konda Sub-district, farm women generally play a very important role in supporting the economic sustainability of the family, through their active involvement in the informal sector. This transformation has occurred since agricultural technology (agricultural modernization) was implemented because slowly but surely their traditional roles have been replaced. In previous research, the role of women farmers in the wet-rice farming sector shows that their involvement starts from land preparation, planting, maintenance, eradicating pests and plant diseases to harvesting, post-harvesting such as threshing, harvesting, cleaning crops, transporting, sorting crops, and marketing. and marketing. However, these roles have gradually changed due to the introduction of agricultural modernization.

When this happens, there is no other option for farm women to maintain the economic sustainability of their families, except by "role transformation" to the informal sector, which is seen by farm women as a very important "economic buoy", because entering this sector does not require large capital and skills. The process can be visualized as follows.



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The results of this study are relevant to the findings of Muzakiyah, (2017) who argues that as an integral part of the informal sector, farm women have a very important role in supporting the economic sustainability of the family and maintaining household survival. Traditions that have been deeply embedded in agrarian societies place women in a position as household managers and fulfillers of the family's daily needs. However, the transformation of the role of peasant women occurs in line with the evolving economic and social dynamics.

Furthermore, Rola-Rubzen et al. (2023) argue that structural changes in agrarian societies do not only include economic aspects, but also involve shifts in values and norms governing relationships. (ROLA-RUBZEN et al., 2023). Such shifts have occurred in line with women's increased access to education and information, as well as the adoption of modern technology in the agricultural sector. It has opened up new opportunities for women to engage in various economic activities outside the household. They are not only involved in agricultural production, but also in various business activities such as handicrafts, trade, and other services.

Siscawati et al. (2020) argue that the growing understanding of the importance of women's participation in development has encouraged more inclusive women's empowerment policies and programs.

However, Ernanda (2023) argues that, despite changes in understanding and policy, strong gender norms still pose a challenge in expanding women's space in the informal sector. Although patriarchal culture is less dominant in the family farming community, women's access to productive resources such as land, capital, and technology is still relatively limited. Asriani et al. (2021) argue that in this context, it is important to recognize that the transformation of the role of women farmers in the informal sector is not only an economic issue, but also a complex social and cultural issue.

# Changes in Social Structure in the Transformation of Women Farmers in Farmer Communities

The phenomenon of changes in social structure occurring in farming communities in Konda Subdistrict due to the transformation of the role of women farmers is in line with the results of research by Herrfahrdt-Pähle et al. (2020), that changes in social structure in farming communities include transformations in changes in status and power, patterns of social interaction and social layering.

1. Changes in Status and Power

The informal sector, which encompasses a range of activities outside the agricultural sector such as small-scale trade, home industries, and services, is often where women farmers play a significant role. However, Bryan et al. (2024) argue that, in many cases, their roles and contributions tend to be marginalized and ignored in development policies and economic programs.

In the case of Konda Sub-district, South Konawe Regency, changes in the status and power of peasant women occur when peasant women transform from the wet-rice farming sector to the informal sector. This change not only affects their lives individually, but also affects the farming community as a whole. The transformation of peasant women's roles from the wetrice farming sector to the informal sector has strengthened the position of peasant women in the household. Moreover, their contribution to the household economy is increasingly significant, so that in the power structure and decision-making, peasant women are increasingly taken into account and always involved.

The results of this study are relevant to the views of Muhaimin et al. (2023) who explain that one important aspect of this change is the recognition of the significant economic contributions made by farm women in the informal sector. Although often not counted in official statistics, their role in producing food, maintaining environmental sustainability, and nurturing social and cultural life in rural areas is crucial. Ali & Kamraju, (2023) argue that, research and a better understanding of their role can help drive more inclusive policies and development programs that take into account the needs and aspirations of farm women. In addition, changes in the understanding of gender and social justice have also played an important role in shifting the status and power of peasant women.

### 2. Changes in Social Interaction Patterns

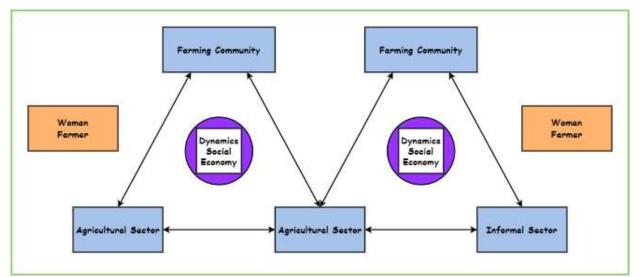
Changes in the social relations of farm women in the informal sector are a complex phenomenon and have a significant impact on economic and social dynamics in farming communities. Ou-Salah et al. (2024) argue that these changes reflect an evolution in the role and contribution of women in the informal

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agricultural sector, and show a transformation in the understanding of gender in agrarian societies.

Farm women, who were previously limited to domestic roles, are now increasingly involved in activities in the informal sector outside the household. Turner et al. (2020) argue that these changes not only have an impact on economic aspects, but also affect social dynamics and power relations in agrarian societies. Although, farm women often do not have the same access as men to resources such as land, capital and agricultural technology. However, with their involvement in the informal sector, there has been a shift in the patterns of interaction among peasant women, which were initially mostly carried out in the agricultural sector and the community, but have now shifted to the informal sector and the community. These changes can be visualized as follows.



Changes in the social interaction patterns of farm women from the agricultural sector to the informal sector are not only limited to an understanding of economic and social dynamics, but also have profound implications for efforts to empower women and sustainable development. This change offers new opportunities for women's empowerment at the individual and community levels. Through active participation in the informal sector, farm women have the opportunity to access economic resources and increase their financial independence.

With the involvement of women in economic activities outside the household, there are more inetns social relations with intense interaction patterns, both among farm women, as well as with consumers and raw material suppliers. This can help reduce the gender gap and increase women's participation in the regional economy. Tsikata, (2015) argues that, changes in social relations that have an impact on changes in the patterns of social interaction of farm women in the agricultural and informal sectors have reflected complex dynamics in the farming community. These changes offer great opportunities for women's empowerment and positive changes in social and economic dynamics.

### **Changes in Social Layering in Farmer Communities**

In recent decades, particularly in the farming communities of Konda Sub-district, there has been a significant shift in the social stratification of households as social and economic dynamics affect farm women in the informal sector.

The farming households in Kecamatan Konda are generally ex-transmigrants from Java who were brought to Kecamatan Konda in the early 1970s. At that time, each farming household received an average of 1 ha of land from the government, consisting of 0.5 ha of agricultural land and 0.5 ha of residential land and yard. Over a period of approximately 20 years there have been changes in the size of farmland holdings for each farming household. Because there are some farming households that are considered "successful", then buy agricultural land and rice fields from farmers who need "money" for family needs, besides that they also buy rice fields from local communities. Thus, from the early 1990s until now, there has been a change in the social stratification of the farming community based on the size of land ownership, as follows: (1) successful farmers who own a large area of farmland, (2) medium farmers whose

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farmland area remains constant, and (3) small farmers whose farmland area is reduced or no longer exists.

These changes can be seen in the following table.

No.	Classification	Extent of Agricultural Land Ownership	
		Year 1970 - 1990	1990-present
1	Successful farmers	0.5 Ha	Increase > 0.5 Ha
2	Medium farmer	0.5 Ha	Fixed 0.5 Ha
3	Smallholder farmers	0.5 Ha	Reduced/sold

Table 1. Changes in Social Layering Based on Changes in Land Ownership Area

In addition, the impact of structural changes on the role of farm women is also one of the sources causing changes in social layers in the farming community. Structural changes through agricultural modernization have encouraged farm women to transform into the informal sector and contribute significantly to the household economy. This condition has also had an impact on changes in consumption patterns and economic diversification. Dadi et al. (2022) argue that changes in consumption patterns and economic diversification have affected the way farm women participate in economic activities within and outside the agricultural sector.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study reveals that the role of farm women in the informal sector has undergone a significant transformation in the Farmer Community of Konda Sub-district, South Konawe District. The results show that peasant women in this area face the dynamics of gender change and social structures that affect their roles and contributions in agricultural activities.

In the past, farm women were typically confined to domestic and auxiliary roles in agricultural activities, with limited access to resources and opportunities to actively participate in farm-related decisions. However, in recent years, there has been a shift in the gender paradigm in these communities. Farm women are increasingly actively involved in various aspects of the informal sector.

The transformation of peasant women in the informal sector has led to changes in status and power in peasant households, shifts in patterns of interaction in peasant women, which were initially more carried out in the agricultural sector, are now changing in the informal and community sectors and changes in social layers in the peasant community due to land commercialization carried out by small farmers against "successful" farmers in the village.

Despite progress in the role of farm women in the informal sector and their contribution to the household economy, there are still some challenges that need to be addressed. One of them is the gap in access to resources, such as land and capital, between farm women and men. In addition, social norms that still prioritize the traditional role of women in the household are also an obstacle to efforts to empower women in farming communities.

In this context, greater efforts are needed from various parties, including the government, nongovernmental organizations, and local communities, to strengthen the role and contribution of farm women in the informal and agricultural sectors. Measures needed include improving farm women's access to resources, providing relevant training and education, and advocating for changes in social norms that support gender equality in farming communities.

As such, this research makes an important contribution to understanding the dynamics of transforming the roles of farm women in the informal sector, as well as highlighting the importance of collaborative efforts to create an inclusive and equitable environment for all community members in farming communities.

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