



Implementing Household Food Security: A Perspective of Religion Leader on the Gender Roles as a Agent of Change

Hayati^{1*}, A Sahidu², Muktasam³

Department of Agricultural Socio-Economics, Faculty of Agriculture,
University of Mataram

Corresponding Author: Hayati, hayati@unram.ac.id

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: Food Security,
Household, Religious
Leaders, Gender

Received : 7, August

Revised : 21, August

Accepted: 23, September

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ABSTRACT

Building household food security requires collaboration from all levels of society, including men, women, and community leaders. In this case, the role of religious leaders is considered crucial to promote gender equality in order to realize this goal. This study analyzes the perception of religious leaders in West Lombok Regency regarding the role of gender in household food security and its relationship with demographic characteristics, internal and external factors. The research method was conducted by interviewing 60 respondents in three sub-districts (Narmada, Gerung, and Batulayar) using questionnaires, complemented by in-depth interviews with key informants. The collected data was then analyzed with descriptive statistics and a Spearman rating correlation test. The findings of the study show that most religious leaders agree on the importance of gender equality in terms of food availability, such as in rice and non-rice production activities. However, for the aspect of access and utilization of food, they argue that the role of women is still more dominant and that is considered appropriate. The study also revealed that the perceptions of religious leaders are closely related to their access to information. Therefore, to realize an ideal household food security where responsibilities are shared equally between men and women, efforts are needed to increase access to information for religious leaders.

INTRODUCTION

The achievement of food security at the household level is reflected in the success of food diversification and the fulfillment of nutrition for each member [1-3]. In contrast, food insecurity is closely related to deficits in energy and nutrient intake, which are factors that cause stunting – a child's growth disorder due to chronic malnutrition so that his height is not appropriate for age. The risk of stunting is increasing due to the lack of consumption of nutritious food in pregnant women and toddlers [4,5]. This is illustrated by the high stunting rate in West Lombok Regency which reached 10,252 cases (28.98%). Therefore, the consumption of diverse and nutritious food proportionally and according to the needs of all household members is a must.

The culture of rural communities on the island of Lombok places women as the main culprits in the preparation and distribution of food for the family, a practice related to the division of gender roles that places women in the domestic sphere and men in the public sphere [2,3,7,9]. Therefore, efforts to achieve household food security in this region must involve effective cooperation between government agencies, non-government, and the community by taking into account the cultural context [6-8].

The role of men as the head of the family is crucial in realizing household food security. Efforts to strengthen this role need to be continued to promote gender equality and produce healthy and quality family members [10,11]. Research [12] indicates that food and nutrition diversification is closely related to individual perception. The findings [13] suggest that men's perceptions of gender equality in food security are often inaccurate, due to entrenched gender stereotypes. Therefore, socialization and counseling targeting men about the importance of gender role equality is absolutely necessary to achieve household food security.

The people of Lombok Island strongly recognize and respect the existence of their religious leaders [14]. This respected position makes them key figures who can play an optimal role as a source of information and agents of change to promote gender equality in realizing household food security. In order to support this strategic role, it is necessary to have a proper understanding of the perceptions possessed by religious leaders themselves. Therefore, this study aims to: (1) Analyze the perception of religious leaders in West Lombok Regency regarding the role of gender in household food security activities, and (2) Analyze the factors that influence these perceptions.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Based on a narrative review by Pineau et al. [18], household food security is not just an economic or nutritional issue, but is strongly shaped by gender, social, and cultural dimensions. The study revealed that women, particularly single mothers, experience disproportionate vulnerability to food insecurity due to structural injustices such as poverty, unequal domestic responsibilities, and inadequate policy support. The traditional gender role that positions women as the main food managers in the household increases their exposure to psychological and social burdens when they are unable to meet their family's food needs. This situation is often exacerbated by the stigma and shame that

arises from failing to conform to social expectations such as providing "healthy" food or adhering to "ideal" baby feeding practices that can lead to social exclusion and decreased mental well-being.

Based on a systematic review by Tantoh et al. [19], gender roles are closely related to water, land, and food resources (WLF) management, particularly in the context of climate change in Sub-Saharan Africa. The study highlights that women, despite being major actors in agriculture and household food supply, face significant barriers in accessing and controlling key resources such as land, water, and credit due to patriarchal norms, discriminatory cultural practices, and top-down policy approaches. These structural inequalities are exacerbated by climate change, which intensifies pre-existing vulnerabilities and further marginalizes women, thereby limiting their ability to contribute to household food security. The authors argue that gender-sensitive approaches, including women's involvement in decision-making processes and recognition of their role in natural resource management, are critical to achieving sustainable food systems. In this context, religious leaders, who are often the custodians of influential cultural and social norms, can play a transformative role in challenging gender inequality and encouraging equitable access to resources. By advocating for gender justice within religious and community frameworks, religious leaders can help reframe traditional gender roles, support women's empowerment, and facilitate more inclusive and resilient food security strategies. This is in line with the broader need for a culturally based and bottom-up approach that integrates gender perspectives into climate adaptation and food security initiatives.

Based on research by Wei et al. [20] in rural Bangladesh, women's empowerment has been shown to have a significant relationship with household food security, particularly through the dimensions of legal rights, family rights, decision-making, access to information and communication technology (ICT), and infrastructure facilities. The theoretical framework used refers to Kabeer's (1999) resource–agency–achievement approach, which emphasizes that resources (such as access to information, infrastructure, and legal rights) and agency (the ability to make decisions and freedom within the family) are prerequisites for achieving desired outcomes, including food security. This study shows that when women have greater control over household resources and can actively participate in decision-making, food insecurity can be significantly reduced. However, women's leadership has not had a significant impact, in part due to social norms that limit women's public roles in patriarchal societies.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a purposive sampling method by selecting three sub-districts in West Lombok Regency that have the highest prevalence of stunting, namely Narmada, Gerung, and Batulayar. The survey method was applied through interviews using a structured questionnaire of 60 respondents, complemented by in-depth interviews with religious leaders and officials of relevant government agencies (Regional Office of the Ministry of Religion of NTB Province). The data were analyzed statistically descriptively to measure

perceptions and inferential statistics with the Spearman Rank correlation test to identify factors related to these perceptions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The perception of religious leaders towards each component of household food security shows variations. Based on Table 1, in the aspect of food availability, the majority of respondents (70.0%) view that gender equality between men and women is needed in food production activities. On the other hand, in terms of access to and utilization of food, 61.7% and 65.0% of religious leaders, respectively, perceive that there is a division of labor based on gender, where there are tasks that are considered specific for women or men. The rest argue that gender equality is still necessary in both aspects.

Religious Leaders' Perceptions of Aspects of Food Availability in Households

Food availability is the main foundation in meeting household needs, which must include sufficiency both in quantity and quality. In this context, gender roles refer to the dynamics of relationships between men and women in the food production process. This activity includes the cultivation of staple food crops (such as rice and other cereals), horticulture (vegetables and fruits), companion crops (peanuts, soybeans), and poultry farming (chickens/ducks) to produce eggs and meat, as well as raising freshwater fish as a source of animal protein.

Based on Table 1, the majority of religious leaders perceive that staple food production activities require equal roles between men and women. They view that ensuring food availability is a shared responsibility. This view is motivated by the culture of the agrarian community in West Lombok, where rice and corn production activities traditionally involve both genders. In addition, the agricultural sector as the main absorber of labor in rural areas is also supported by the significant role of women in farming on various lands.

This study reveals that there is a division of tasks based on gender in rice and corn cultivation. As stated by [15], gender-based division of labor is a system that regulates certain types of work for women and other types for men, in accordance with the norms that apply in society. This division is often associated with the social attributes of masculinity and femininity, which are underpinned by local cultural values. In the context of research, tasks such as land preparation, fertilization, and pest control are generally carried out by men. Meanwhile, activities such as planting, weeding, harvesting, and post-harvest are more carried out by women. Weeding work, which requires squatting or bending over long periods of time, is attached to women based on gender stereotypes that they are more diligent, meticulous, and patient. These findings are in line with the opinion [15] that traits such as loyalty, competence in housekeeping, humility, and perseverance are often associated with women's image.

Table 1. Religious leaders' perceptions of the role of gender in the implementation of household food security activities.

	Category					
	Female/Male		Female > Male Men > Women		Female = Male	
	Number people	of% 	Number people	of% 	Number people	of%
Perception of food1 availability aspects		1.7	17	28.3	43	70.0
Perceptions of3 aspects of food access		5.0	37	61.7	20	33.3
Perception of2 aspects of food utilization		3.3	39	65.0	19	31.7

Source: Primary data processed, 2022

A similar pattern is also seen in the activities of growing vegetables and fruits, as well as raising poultry in the yard, which is generally done in mutual cooperation by men and women. The majority of religious leaders in this study expressed the view that as long as it is physically possible, these kinds of jobs can be done by individuals of any gender. The flexibility of this role is even apparent in emergency situations; For example, if a husband falls ill or works as a migrant worker, the wife can take over the responsibility of food production to meet the needs of the family. However, not all religious leaders agree with this view. Some still argue that growing vegetables is the domain and obligation of women as wives, not the responsibility of men. They consider the cultivation of crops such as long beans, kale, cabbage, and spinach in the field to be a feminine role. This difference of opinion indicates that despite the trend of equality, there is still a significant diversity of perceptions among religious leaders regarding the division of gender roles in household food production.

Religious Leaders' Perceptions of Aspects of Food Access in Households

Household food access includes all efforts to obtain adequate daily consumables, which is a prerequisite for ensuring food availability. This aspect requires the capacity to access food sources. The key question is who is responsible for accessing the food, whether it comes from rice fields, own or neighbors' yards, purchases at markets/shops, the use of husbands' income from the agricultural sector, receiving government assistance, loans/debts, and the use of women's income to buy food at stalls or vegetables.

This study examines the perception of religious leaders regarding the division of gender roles in accessing various types of food such as staples, vegetables, fruits, vegetable protein sources, and animals to meet household

needs. The findings show that the majority of respondents (61.7%) still view gender bias. They tend to view men as the more dominant party in accessing food from agricultural land, arguing that men are responsible for being the main managers of farming. Activities in the field are considered to be male's domain because the frequency with which they work in those locations is higher. In addition, tasks such as planting or picking vegetables in the rice fields are perceived to be easier for men to do. The reason given is that working in the rice fields takes a long time and a lot of energy, so it is considered a hard job that is more suitable for husbands than wives.

On the other hand, the activity of collecting food from the yard of the house tends to be perceived by religious leaders as the most appropriate role for women (wives). The reason is that its location is close and easy to reach makes this task considered light and practical. Some religious leaders are even more extreme, that all activities outside the home are the responsibility of the husband, while the wife should concentrate fully on domestic affairs. A similar view also applies to the taking of food from relatives' or neighbors' land – such as picking moringa leaves in the surrounding yard which is considered part of the role of women. However, overall, the main responsibility in accessing food for household needs is still dominated by women.

The source of food consumed by households does not only come from their own production in rice fields and yards, but can also use land owned by neighbors or families. For types of food that cannot be produced independently, households will obtain it by buying from stalls or markets. In this context, the perception of religious leaders as research respondents shows interesting variations. Access to food through purchases in the market is dominated by the role of women. Meanwhile, men generally only act as companions, considering the location of the market relatively far from home. However, the role of men becomes more significant when making large-scale purchases. On the other hand, in situations of facing economic problems such as taking loans to meet daily needs, men tend to play a dominant role. Although it is not uncommon for women to also engage in borrowing or borrowing activities, the final decision usually still requires the approval of the husband as the head of the family.

It can be concluded that women play a crucial role in realizing household food security, even becoming the main determinant of the status of family food security. However, ironically, female-headed households are actually more vulnerable to food insecurity than male-headed ones [16,17]. Facts reveal that when women work for a living, they tend to allocate a larger proportion of income to household food needs than men [3,17]. In addition, the ability to meet food needs is also closely related to the management of productive and financial assets. Women who manage small-scale forest land typically have greater access to and control over income from forest products, which are then allocated for food. In contrast, in households with extensive forest land ownership, control over management and income tends to be held by men [9].

Religious Leaders' Perceptions of Aspects of Food Utilization in the Household

Respondents' perceptions of the role of religious leaders in the aspect of food use are reflected through their views on the division of gender responsibilities in various activities. These activities include processing and providing nutritious, diverse, and balanced food; ensuring that each family member consumes food according to their nutritional needs; as well as monitoring and ensuring the fulfillment of nutrition for pregnant women, babies, and toddlers through the consumption of nutritious, diverse, and balanced food.

The findings of the study revealed that 65% of respondents of religious leaders have a perception that is still gender-biased, considering food utilization activities as the domain of women's work. Meanwhile, as many as 31.7% of respondents expressed an inclusive view that men should play an equal role with women in providing and ensuring diverse, nutritious, and balanced food consumption for all family members—especially for pregnant women, babies, and toddlers—according to their respective needs. The dominance of this traditional gender perception is strongly influenced by the cultural factors of the Lombok society which places women in the domestic realm and men in the public realm.

The Relationship between Religious Leaders' Perceptions of the Role of Gender in the Implementation of Household Food Security Activities.

Based on the results of the study, external factors—especially access to information—are the only significant variables related to religious leaders' perceptions of the role of gender in household food security. These findings show that the better the access to information received by religious leaders about the urgency of gender equality in all three aspects of food security (availability, access, and utilization), the more positive their perception of the importance of gender equality will be. This impact is particularly evident in the context of food utilization, which includes ensuring diverse, nutritious, and balanced food consumption at the household level.

The majority of religious leaders have limited access to information regarding the importance of consuming diverse, nutritious, and balanced foods for stunting prevention. Better access to information is generally owned by respondents who have the status of Civil Servants (PNS) in government agencies such as the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religion or the Office of Religious Affairs (KUA), as well as religious leaders who build networks with government agencies (Health Office, Puskesmas), social organizations (PKK, Posyandu), and religious institutions (Majelis Masjid, MUI). These findings confirm that active interaction between religious leaders and various sources of information can increase their understanding of the urgency of awareness of nutritious food consumption at the household level. Therefore, strategic efforts are needed to expand access to information for religious leaders on gender equality and household food security practices.

Table 2. Factors related to religious leaders' perceptions of gender roles in the implementation of household food security activities.

	Correlation coefficient
	Perceptions of food security
Demographic characteristics	0.246
Age	
Education	0.204
A long time ago a religious leader	0.113
Internal and external	
Motivation	0,758
Access information	0,042*
Institutional support	0.110

Source: Primary data processed, 2022.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the analysis, it is concluded that the perception of religious leaders regarding the role of gender in household food security is still dominated by gender-biased views. The majority of religious leaders view women as more appropriate in handling aspects of food access (obtaining food) and food utilization (ensuring balanced nutritional consumption), while in food production, women are considered more competent for jobs that require precision and patience such as farming in the yard. A key factor influencing this perception is access to information, where religious figures with wider information exposure tend to have more progressive perceptions of gender equality in food security.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The strategic role of religious leaders needs to be strengthened to encourage the realization of gender equality and household food security, especially in the aspects of food availability, access, and utilization. These efforts can ultimately contribute significantly to stunting prevention. For this reason, increasing the capacity of religious leaders as agents of change is urgent, including through the implementation of counseling, special training, and expanded access to related information.

FURTHER STUDY

A potential direction for further study is to explore how targeted information dissemination and educational interventions could influence religious leaders' perceptions of gender roles in household food security. Future research may compare communities with varying levels of media and training exposure to assess shifts toward more gender-equitable views. Additionally,

examining the perspectives of women and other community stakeholders alongside religious leaders could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how gender dynamics shape food production, access, and utilization within households.

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